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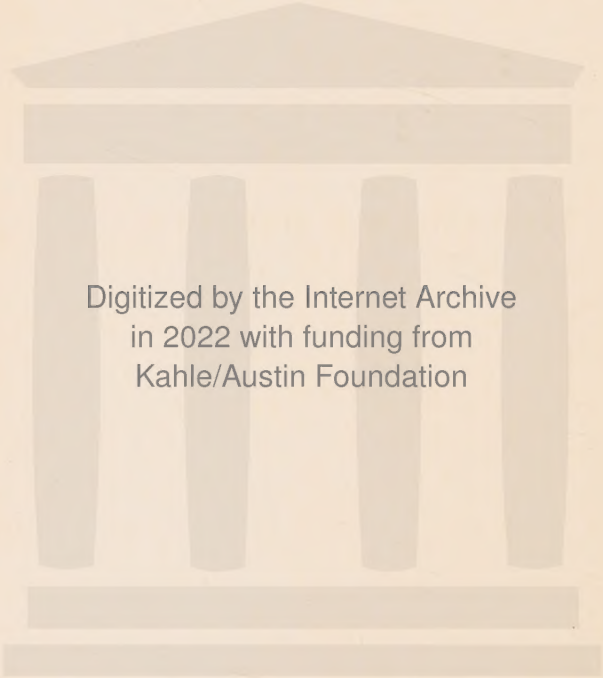
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By Hal G. Evarts

THE CROSS PULL

THE BALD FACE: AND OTHER ANIMAL STORIES

FUR SIGN

TUMBLEWEEDS

SPANISH ACRES

THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

FUR BRIGADE

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By

HAL G. EVARTS

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TO

MY MOTHER

a pioneer woman of the troubled days of Kansas
almost three quarters of a century ago,
this work is affectionately
dedicated

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CHAPTER I

Rodney Buckner's first struggle toward wakefulness was occasioned by the harsh voice of the woman bidding him rise and go after the cow. Then the lingering remnants of sleep were dispelled by a deafening explosion as a flintlock was discharged through the half-open door and the spreading dawn was rent by the fiendish war whoop of savages.

Ensuing events were but a vivid nightmare of horrors. The cabin swarmed with painted warriors. There was the sound of a blow, a shriek of mortal hurt or terror. The bedding which sheltered him was plucked from his trembling form, an iron hand seized his wrist and he was rudely dragged from his bunk. His captor, brandishing before his horrified eyes a menacing tomahawk, expelled the few English words, "Boy no talk!" in such a fierce tone as to freeze unuttered the anguished wail that trembled on his lips.

On the floor lay the forms of an older girl and the young man of the household. He was dragged out through the door by his captor, almost stumbling over the still shape of Johnny Aiken, the youngest son of the woman, a boy two years older than himself. He was propelled towards the spot where the woman, a tall, gaunt person, her hands pinioned behind her, stood in the custody of two towering

savages. Then he was entering the forest while the faint light of dawn was amplified by the glare of the blazing cabin.

A briar thorn pricked his foot and he halted to seize the injured member with his hands. The savage just behind him thrust him forward with a sharp grunt of impatience. Rodney could see that a half dozen warriors led the way in single file. Next came the woman, another warrior, then himself. Five more savages brought up the rear. The sinuous progress of this procession along the winding path through the gloomy forest recalled to his childish mind the gliding movement of a huge blacksnake that had swallowed two young chickens in their garden a few days before. His throat constricted with terror—also with thirst; and he was fiercely hungry before they had been on the trail an hour. His feet and legs burned from occasional briar pricks.

The tall figure of the woman strode on and on as if she could never tire or falter. Always she had impressed him that way—indestructible, driving, relentless. From the first he had felt little about her that was lovable. Of his own mother, he had but a vague recollection of a gracious, loving presence. After her premature death his bereaved father had drifted westward with Rodney, eventually to leave him with this pioneer woman while he accompanied her husband, Aiken, in search of a fabled mine still deeper in the wilderness. Neither had been heard of again and the boy had been left an unwelcome

burden upon the hands of this woman. A stern, rather harsh creature, and no doubt harassed by the cares and anxieties of carrying on alone, she had found little time for gentleness. But now the boy drew a measure of comfort from that very harsh efficiency that was hers. Her presence seemed a tower of strength to him.

His legs grew weary and each foot seemed a leaden weight. But whenever he lagged, the fierce Wyandotte who could speak a few words of English hissed the command, "Boy hurry!" Presently he stubbed his toe painfully.

"I am too tired to go on!" he cried out.

The woman, wise in the ways of the Indians, knew that captives usually were treated well until such time as a council was held in some Indian town to decide their fate. But those that were too frail or ailing to keep up the pace on the trail were dispatched without hesitation.

"You'll have to keep up, Rod," she said without turning her head. "If you lag, one of 'em will fetch you a clip with a hatchet."

The boy had never disobeyed that voice with impunity and he responded to it now, trotting along manfully to close the gap. Fatigue dragged at him but terror spurred him on to fresh exertions.

The distant sound of occasional gunshots and the faint gobbling yelps of the war whoop reached their ears from ahead and to the right, and Rodney knew that the savages were making an attack on the cabins of three settlers at a spot known as Jamie-

son's Farm. The intermittent nature of the sounds had conveyed to the ears of the warriors that the whites at Jamieson's were making a stubborn resistance. They commented upon it in their own tongue.

Presently they stopped at a spring and refreshed themselves. Another and longer string of savages came through the forest and joined them. Two men prisoners accompanied the new arrivals. The captives were heavily burdened with various plunder that had been captured by the savages.

They were two bondmen, having sold themselves into bondage for a period of years to work out the price of their passage to this new land. They had gone outside at dawn, only to be captured by the first rush of the savages. The others of the Jamieson settlement had succeeded in barricading themselves in the three cabins and beating off the assailants.

"Them as took us is Wyandottes, with a few Ottawas throwed in," said the woman. "The ones that got you is Senecas. All the tribes must have gone out again."

The weaker of the two captives, too frail to support his burden, stumbled frequently. At last an exasperated savage swung a tomahawk upon his skull, stooped to encircle his head with a knife and wrenched off the scalp.

"God ha' mercy on his soul," the other man mumbled.

The woman made no comment. When the slain man's burden was tranferred to her shoulders she

moved off with it without so much as a murmur of protest.

Rod, at the point of exhaustion, stumbled occasionally and fell, but remembering that bloody example of the fate that awaited laggards he recovered his footing and spurted ahead with such manifest terror that the savages were moved to mirth.

"You pooty good boy," the big Wyandotte said presently, and Rod found himself riding astride a powerful back.

The party halted at nightfall on the banks of a creek. Rod was handed a small piece of dried meat and a few grains of parched corn. The savages fashioned small hoops out of green dogwood upon which they stretched the reeking scalps taken in the recent raids and hung them in the smoke of the camp fire.

When one is aged eight, it is not given to him fully to gauge the grief of others. He did not miss Johnny Aiken, who had bullied him shamelessly. Therefore, he could not divine what raged in the breast of this border woman when those grisly trophies were suspended there to be smoke-cured.

Grim and silent, apparently as emotionless and unyielding as the rock against which she leaned, the woman sat among her captors until the latter staked both herself and the man captive upon their backs for the night. Rod watched them tie her ankles to stakes, tie a thong about her neck and fasten it to a tree. A six-foot pole was placed across her breast

and to this her extended arms were securely lashed. Thus spread-eagled on her back, she could scarcely so much as shift her position to ease the strain.

At dawn the procession resumed its way. In the evening a great river, the Ohio, was crossed by means of bark canoes. All west of the Ohio was Indian country. The party floundered through swamps and waded creeks, heading ever deeper into the unknown wilderness of the West.

On the fourth day they came to a clearing that was planted in corn. The log-and-bark lodges on the edge of the forest beyond indicated a fair-sized Indian town. The woman knew that they had reached some tributary of the Upper Muskingum. An excited throng surged around the victorious war party. A halt was made at the edge of town and a heated discussion took place between the townspeople and the returning warriors. All seemed to agree upon some common plan and the man prisoner was divested of his burden and stood staring stupidly about him.

Two lines of savages were forming to fashion a lane that led to the big log-and-bark council house two hundred yards away. From his perch on the Wyandotte's shoulders Rod watched these sinister preparations. A burly, bearded white man clad in buckskins stood among the savages and Rod wondered why he did not do something to help the captive. But his thick-lipped mouth grinned approval. Evidently he enjoyed this scene.

The man prisoner was propelled suddenly for-

ward between the two lines and he spurted desperately for the council house. He was slashed with knife and tomahawk, struck with whip and clubs. All such blows, which he believed were efforts to kill him, actually were carefully calculated to avoid that end. He was to be reserved for a far more ghastly fate. He reached the council house and fell exhausted.

Rod and the woman were secured in a hut under guard. The male prisoner was brought in, stripped, his body painted black with a mixture of soot and bear grease. He was a stupid ox of a man, new to the frontier and unaware of the dreadful significance of this blackening process. But the woman knew.

"God help him to endure!" Rod heard her mutter.

The white man came in. The woman knew that the French traders and American borderers who roved the Indian country sought to purchase the lives of captives who had been condemned to the stake.

"Kin you buy his life?" she asked the trader.

"Me? Pay my own goods for his worthless hulk?" the man demanded, turning upon her fiercely. "What have they done for me except drive the French out? Hah! I have help roast many the one! And will have a hot ramrod for this fat sheep."

The woman did not answer. Well, there were men like this one too.

At nightfall, the man prisoner was led out. Presently the drowsing boy was roused by dreadful animal screams of agony that froze the blood in his veins. All through the night he woke in horror, as

some particularly piercing shriek assailed his ears. His exhausted body forced blessed if intermittent sleep upon him. But the fear and horror of it had fixed the face of the Frenchman indelibly in his mind as that of some dreadful monster. He waked in the gray light of dawn. The sounds outside were dying down and presently there was silence save for the thin whine of mosquitoes in the lodge. The woman spoke from the gloom.

"Our trails fork from here, Rod. 'Tain't likely we 'll meet ag'in. I got nothing left to live for. But you're a Virginny Buckner—proud stock. You'll have kin somewheres and maybe they'll buy you back. I'm to be took to the Wyandotte towns and you have been sold to the Shawnees. They'll treat you well. G'bye, Rod."

It was the same sort of parting endured by untold thousands of captives as a land-hungry people pushed the savages foot by foot back through the wilderness—parting thus, never to hear of one another again.

CHAPTER II

Several more days of traveling west and south with strange Indians and Rod came to a tremendous Indian town which he was to know as Chillicothe, the capital of the Shawnee nation. Later, he was taken a day's march to a smaller Shawnee town and conducted to a sizable lodge in which were a young squaw and her son, a youth of about Rod's own age. The squaw took him to the creek, scrubbed him thoroughly and divested him of his tattered shirt, then clothed him in leggings and jacket of soft deerskin. His feet were incased in moccasins.

He had traveled so steadily that he believed this to be but another overnight stop but when morning came he ate with the others and was not summoned to take the trail again. The Indian youth, stripped of his buckskins and playing in the sun with others of his age, made frequent pilgrimages to the entrance of the lodge to display the captive to his fellows. The squaw had gone to work in the cornfield. Upon her return she took Rod by the hand and led him forth, visiting various lodges in the village, in each of which the white captive was offered food. Then she left him outside with the Indian boy of the household and several other naked urchins.

They spoke to him in a strange tongue and their

advances seemed friendly. When they signed him to accompany them to the creek, he followed, and when they took to the water he peeled his buckskins and joined them. He was as much at home in the water as an otter. The Indian boy took him for a precarious ride in a tiny elm-bark canoe and allowed him to shoot two blunt arrows from his bow.

Rod slept again in the lodge and left it next morning without hesitation at a summons from his dusky companion. A group of hunters returned during the day, bringing a black bear, a dozen deer and several turkeys and raccoons. One of them took up quarters in the lodge as head of the household and seemed to accept Rod's presence there as a natural thing. The boy afterwards learned that he had been adopted to fill the place of a son that had died. Killcat, the Shawnee warrior, presented him with a small bow and a bark quiver filled with arrows. Winnebanca, his foster mother, lavished affections upon him. In every way he was treated with the same consideration as that accorded his foster brother, Standing Bear.

He accompanied the Shawnee youth on long hunting excursions in the forest, stalking birds and small rodents and launching many shafts without doing much execution. These hunts became almost daily affairs. The vibrating rattle of a woodpecker, the strident shriek of a flicker, the plaintive call of wood pewee, sprightly conversation of a chickadee or the sneering clamor of a jay would serve to transform them into miniature images of the wilderness hunter,

stalking with utmost caution toward the sound. The Indian lad would hold up his hand and pronounce a strange word when the voice of some bird reached them and presently, with the natural imitativeness of youth, the white boy repeated these words after him. In a surprisingly short span of time he learned the names of all the wild things, also of the various utensils and articles of food in common use.

One day the Indian boy lifted his voice in imitation of the call of a crow that was winging high overhead. Rod did likewise and the dusky youth was surprised at the accuracy of the white boy's rendition. There was admiration in his glance as he petitioned Rod to repeat the call. For several minutes the forest rang with their alternate vocal efforts. Rod's imitation was by far the best of the two. Expanding under the other's approval, he suddenly gave the piercing liquid whistle of the cardinal and received a prompt answer from a leafy thicket. The young Shawnee was elated. From his earliest recollection, Rod had amused himself with imitating the notes of the birds and had acquired an astonishing degree of proficiency. Such matters were part of the schooling among the young of the Indians and they were amazed that this newcomer, so little skilled in their games, should excel in this particular. He was called upon for frequent performances and so, day after day, perfected the art for which he had been gifted with a natural aptitude.

He rapidly picked up a smattering of the Shawnee tongue and a workable knowledge of the sign lan-

guage common to all the tribes of the Indian Confederacy. When the snows came and the streams were frozen over, he fished with the other youths of the village through holes cut in the ice of lake and stream. The warriors, between protracted spells of loafing, indulged in hunting excursions and returned burdened with meat and hides. By spring Rod had become proficient at the various sports of the village youths and had mastered the Shawnee tongue.

Much of their play had to do with war. One faction would slip away to establish itself in some fancied secret stronghold. The opposing forces, by means of their scouts, must locate such enemy stronghold, sneak upon it and stage a surprise rush upon the foe. It was the aim of those who were being sought to lure the attacking force into ambush and launch a surprise assault. It was conducted much more realistically than the war games of civilized youths. The scouts were expected to do real scouting. There was no calling back and forth. When within sight of one another, comrades in arms communicated only by sign language. When separated they signalled by means of prearranged bird notes. Rod was easily the master of this latter means of communication and he rapidly acquired proficiency in all branches of the game. He could glide through the forest as noiselessly as a shadow. His quick eye detected the slightest movement in thicket or tangle of down-timber ahead. He could move from one bit of cover to the next, writhing along on his stomach with almost the expertness of a snake. There was no hurry in

these games, the whole day being allotted to one such raid if deemed necessary, as there were no duties to which the Indian youths must hasten. This being the case, they acquired a patience that could scarcely be emulated by white youths of the settlements, whose play wars necessarily must be staged in the brief intervals between periods of labor and brought to a termination before the time that such duties were required of them.

Relieved of this pressure for time, such as had characterized his games with Johnny Aiken, Rod now found himself with ample leisure in which to cultivate the incredible patience of his companions. He learned the art of remaining absolutely motionless behind a down log or ensconced in a tree, concealed by a tangle of wild grapevines, or perhaps to lie flat in the merest depression of the forest floor while his enemies of the day prowled past almost within reach of him, then to glide after them with utmost cunning.

From his foster brother, Rod learned that in this one small Shawnee village no less than six of the inhabitants were white, though the closest scrutiny would not reveal that fact. One was an ancient squaw, another a young woman who was the wife of a subchief among the Shawnees and mother of two children. One of the captives, a young warrior of sixteen named Gray Wolf, could remember a few words of English. He had been captured with his three brothers when he was eight years old, he told Rod, but they had been separated and he had seen none

of them since. Rod inquired what his name had been. Gray Wolf reflected for the space of a minute, then replied that his former name had been William Herne.

Rod's Shawnee father, Kill-cat had bestowed upon Rod a many syllabled name meaning Talk-with-birds from his proficiency in the art of bird imitation. One night during his second year among the Shawnees, a war party of Wyandottes stopped overnight in the town and Kill-cat instructed his foster son to demonstrate his talents for the benefit of several who had gathered outside his lodge.

The boy started off with the call of the crow, then the liquid whistle of the cardinal. From the extreme back of his throat came the quavering falsetto of the screech owl, then the querulous yelping of a hen turkey. The warriors gave voice to loud "Hahs!" of approbation and signed him to proceed. He gave a perfect imitation of the quail, both the bobwhite note and the more difficult muster call by which scattered coveys reassemble. From the seductive cooing of a dove he broke suddenly into the shrilling chorus of young frogs on a spring night, the metallic whirr of cicadas on an July afternoon, the chattering bark of a red squirrel; the plaintive cry of the phœbe, the hoarse rasp of the bull bat, the thunder-pumping notes of a bittern far out in the marshes, the silvery notes of migrating plover and the surprised cry of the killdeer.

Several other Wyandottes had come up to join the group, accompanied by a French trader. Roving

Frenchmen were no novelty in the Indian towns and the boy, engrossed in his performance, paid small heed to this one until, standing almost at the man's feet, he glanced up into his face. He found himself confronted by the features of Benoit, the face that was associated in his thoughts with all that was monstrous—indelibly linked in his mind with that ghastly occurrence on the Muskingum. The bird notes were frozen on his lips, he sprang back as if from the strike of a rattler, uttered a shrill yelp of terror and fled. The light was none too good and Kill-cat, the Shawnee, believing that Benoit had struck or pinched Talk-with-birds, leaped to confront the man with uplifted tomahawk and angry demands for explanation.

The man fiercely denied the accusation. When the protesting youth was hailed before him, Rod said that the man had not touched him, but in his manifest terror of the trader his denial did not quite convince Kill-cat. The man scowled upon Rod and declared that he had never before set eyes on him. Doubtless he believed the truth of his own utterance, having no recollection of the cowering little captive that had crouched in the dim shadows of the lodge that night on the Muskingum. He came to the Shawnee town on several occasions and was vastly annoyed at the fear and dislike evidenced toward him by the foster son of Kill-cat.

During temporary periods of peace, American border woodsmen also came occasionally to the Shawnee town. These woodsmen, a wild and roving lot,

led lives that were even more nomadic than those of the savages themselves. Their lives were spent roaming alone or with a few companions far beyond the most isolated frontier posts. In common with the roving French traders, the restrictions of even the smaller settlements were irksome to their wild and unrestrained natures. It was, therefore, quite easy for them to understand why a large majority of the white captives who had been long among the savages had become so accustomed to the free-and-easy life in the Indian towns as to have abandoned all thought of returning to civilized ways. Such captives as did desire to return, however, were often able to send word of their whereabouts to frontier posts by these men and so were ransomed ultimately by their families.

Suddenly the Indian towns were again inflamed with war talk. To the south lay the vast region of Kentucky, swarming with every variety of game, a veritable hunters' paradise. The Cherokees of the South had made a treaty with the Northern tribes of the Indian Confederacy of the Ohio whereby it was mutually agreed that this area between their respective habitats should be set aside forever as the common hunting ground of them all, to be permanently occupied by none.

Now the Long-knives of Virginia, so named from their habit of fighting with the saber, were violating this ancient hunting ground. Under the leadership of a man named Boone, small groups of settlers were crossing over the Cumberlands with a view to estab-

lishing themselves on the fertile lands of Kentucky.

Runners came from other Shawnee towns and from other tribes of the federation. Rod heard much fierce oratory round the council fires. He was particularly impressed with the eloquence of one old Shawnee warrior as he sketched the wrongs of his people.

"My brothers," he began. "My eyes have looked forth upon the passing of a hundred winters and they have seen that the way of the bird who calls the sky his own yet shares it with his fellows is not the way of the porcupine who lives in a burrow in the ground which no other can use. Every Indian owns much land and shares it with all. Every white man owns a little land and shares it with none."

"Ho! We have seen it!" a warrior shouted.

"I have known the day when the red man owned all the land toward the rising sun and shared it with the white men," the sachem continued. "Who owns it now? The mighty Ottawas are gone save for a few. The Wyandottes and Ojibwas are but a handful. The Senecas number but few warriors now. The great nations of our grandfathers the Delawares no longer own the rivers that run to the rising sun and put forth in their canoes upon the inlets of the eastern sea. Most of those remaining now sit in their wigwams on the Muskingum and pray from the white man's medicine book. The once mighty nations of the Potawatamis, Eries and we Shawnees, all are crowded here with those others beyond the Ohio. The Great Spirit has opened my eyes to the future as they

have looked upon the past. What has been will be again."

"No!" proclaimed a warrior who was pacifically inclined. "The Long-knives promise by their own God and by Manitou of the red men that if we give them but a fraction of Kentucky they will never ask for more land again."

"The white men write their promises in the sands," said the ancient. "Then they blow the sands with wind raised by their own voices so there is no trace of what was written."

"But this time—" the pacific one began.

"My son," the ancient interrupted, "almost a hundred years ago I heard the seductive hooting of a grouse when I was starving—and I stalked cautiously toward the sound. I had not yet learned that the grouse causes its voice to rise from thickets other than that in which it hides, so that the hungry hunter will stalk the voice and fail to find the substance. After a hundred years, I have learned to disregard the voice and seek out the hidden bird."

"But this time—" the other began again.

"But this time," the oldster said, "the hunter may find the echo a more filling meal than the meat of the grouse, you think? There is that way too. The Praying Delawares have traveled that trail. It has led them from a mighty nation on the eastern seas to three pitiful villages on the Muskingum since they laid down the tomahawk and picked up the prayer book. It is for you younger men to say whether you shall set the feet of the Shawnees upon it."

An angry murmur rose from the throng. Every warrior scorned to emulate the example of the Praying Delawares.

"What has been will be again," the ancient intoned. "If we listen once more to the ventriloquial hooting of the grouse and let but one Long-knife dig his burrow in the fair lands of Kentucky, then as we have lost the lands of the East, so shall we lose all the lands of the West, even to the setting sun. Then shall the red man vanish from the earth. I have seen it written. I am done."

One after another the ablest warriors rose to declare fiercely that the Long-knives should never get foothold in Kentucky. War parties of ferocious Senecas, Ottawas, Wyandottes and Shawnees began filing toward the south. Kill-cat was among the first to go.

The war games of the Shawnee urchins blazed forth with fresh intensity. Of nights they kindled council fires in the forest and harangued one another after the fashion of grown warriors. Their youthful eloquence was launched upon the winds. When all had been heard, a sapling was topped to serve as a war post and they circled round it. Talk-with-birds, foster son of Kill-cat, was first to strike the war post with his tomahawk and so declare himself for war. His brother, Standing Bear, was next, and stabbed his bone knife deep into the sapling. One and all, even to the most timid, after many circles, rushed upon the war post and smote it. The young Shawnees were unanimously for war.

Then came days of mourning in the Shawnee town and there was wailing in the lodge of Kill-cat. Among the first to go, he had been among the first to fall in battle and his scalp now hung in the wigwams of the Long-knives.

In this small Shawnee town, as among all other Indian communities, the improvident day-and-night gorging so long as the food held out occasioned alternate periods of feast and famine. The hunters brought in deer and buffaloes and turkeys. Wild fowl swarmed the marshes in unbelievable abundance at certain seasons. Bears were numerous and the delicious fat of these animals was pressed into skin containers. The squaws of the Shawnees were adept at making maple sugar. Raccoons were so numerous that the boys caught them by the hundreds in deadfall traps. Fish were plentiful and were taken with elm-bark nets, spears, gigs and baited hooks. Beaver meat formed a considerable item of the menu during the trapping season. There were wild fruits for the picking in the autumn, bee trees from which great quantities of honey were extracted. Then there was always the staple succotash, a mixture of boiled corn and beans. But despite the abundance and variety of the food supply, there were several months during each winter when the improvident feasting of former days resulted in the pinch of famine—and Rod learned what it was to go without food for long hours at a time.

But he learned also of savage generosity. Every morsel of food was justly apportioned. The one who

had so much as a pound of meat or a bark bowl full of succotash and yet shared it not with all would have been degraded in his own eyes and those of his fellows. Gray Wolf, once William Herne, had fought beside his comrade Kill-cat when the latter had fallen in battle. Gray Wolf had been wounded while trying to carry off the body of his friend. The young warrior now took a great interest in the dependent family of his departed comrade and he hunted for the widowed Winnebanca and the two boys, Talk-with-birds and Standing Bear, as conscientiously as if he had been the head of their lodge.

During Rod's eleventh year a little white girl of perhaps six years of age, golden-haired and blue-eyed, was brought into the Shawnee town. A squaw proceeded to scrub the infant at the creek. Her stark terror inspired Rod with a desire to comfort her. English words came awkwardly to his lips when he sought to speak to her in her native tongue.

"They not hurt," he managed at last.

She stared at him wide-eyed.

"They not hurt little girl," he essayed.

She broke away from the squaw and fled to him, casting her tiny wet form against him and clinging desperately.

"I'se so 'fraid," she sobbed frantically. "Don't let them hurt me."

Her little arms gripped his thigh convulsively as he awkwardly patted her wet yellow head.

"They not hurt," he promised grandly.

In some childish way she attributed her subsequent

good treatment entirely to his promise. He loomed as benefactor and protector in her infant mind. Alone of all the village, he could understand her and answer questions—reassure her. Later, attired in her tiny suit of buckskins, she persistently haunted the lodge of his foster mother and dogged his footsteps at every opportunity, as faithfully adoring as a pup. With the adaptability of the young she slipped rapidly into natural acceptance of the life of the village. When the Indian youths engaged in sports, her blue eyes followed the antics of her hero with serene devotion and open pride.

Rod accepted this attention with the indifferent kindness of a youth who is engrossed with games imitative of the pursuits of his elders. When her persistent following threatened to interfere with his very serious duties as a scout by revealing his position to the enemy, he firmly insisted that she return to the village. When she followed too closely upon his heels as he cautiously stalked some prey on his hunting expeditions, he signalled peremptory orders for her to stand motionless. But when he had killed a bird and roasted it over a fire kindled in the forest, he grandly permitted her to partake of the repast. At all times, however, his firmness was tempered with kindliness. And when engaged in less serious pursuits, she was welcome to participate. She soon learned to swim like a baby otter. On occasion he took her for a turn in his little elm-bark canoe. When she complained of the vermin with which every Indian town was infested, and knew not how to rid her

clothing of the pests, he instructed her in the art of depositing her tiny buckskin garments, turned wrong side out, upon the lair of big red ants. The warriors of the latter tribe promptly swarmed forth and converted all stray occupants of the garments into rations for the ant army and rendered them habitable again.

She told him that her name was Patty Lander.

"Patricia?" he asked, and she nodded.

She described events prior to and at the time of her capture. He gathered that she had lived in a small Pennsylvania settlement. For a time he thought of her as Patty Lander and addressed her thus. Then she was given the Indian name of White Fawn and thereafter he addressed her by that title and thought of her in the same way, the other matters which she had related slipping gradually into the background of his mind.

Some six months after her arrival, occasional white men again began to put in an appearance in the Shawnee town. Boone's first ambitious attempts to take settlers into Kentucky had been savagely repulsed. Temporary peace had come again. Rod's Indian mother, Winnebanca, seemed troubled, and lavished her affection upon him. Standing Bear, his brother, was quite openly alarmed.

"They will take you away," he grieved. "The Long-knives will come for you."

This seemed a remote possibility to Rod and he was not much concerned about its probable fulfillment. He could think of no reason why the Long-

knives would tear him from this very satisfactory home.

Eventually, just after he had passed his twelfth birthday, though he was not then aware of its passing, two white men appeared in the village. One was a middle-aged border woodsman whom Rod had seen on former occasions. The other was a large gentleman whose very air proclaimed him a personage of importance. This latter party, he learned, was his uncle—which meant nothing to him.

His foster mother, Winnebanca, sadly explained that a recent treaty stipulated that all captives in the Indian country who wished to return to the settlements must be surrendered to the whites. Rod most emphatically expressed the opposite of any desire to return. But he had not yet attained to the age where his own decision was accepted by his elders and he was to be surrendered whether he would or no. The prospect not only filled him with apprehension but also with profound grief at parting from those he loved.

Gray Wolf, once William Herne, grieved at the boy's impending departure.

"Too much bad, you go," he said, resurrecting his imperfect English for the benefit of the two white men who were taking the captive away. "If they not treat you too much pooty good, you come back sometime. Injun man, he treat Talk-with-birds better."

The little girl captive, known among the Shawnees as White Fawn, had been concealed in the forest so

that the whites would have no knowledge of her presence. Standing Bear, unable to stand the strain of parting, had absented himself. Winnebanca shed copious tears and voiced her soft plaint, "Ay-ee, Ay-ee", rocking sidewise where she sat in the lodge as her foster son was led away.

The youth planned desperately to effect his escape as soon as night mantled the woods with darkness. An anguished wail reached his ears. That despairing cry from the forest, expressing vocally the same depth of anguish that seethed within himself, for the first time made the departing youth acutely aware of the strength of the bond between himself and the tiny captive White Fawn. She was grieving at his departure, as he was grieving for himself.

From a tangled thicket flanking the trail came the plaintive cooing of a mourning dove; later, from a rush-grown marsh, the startled notes of a killdeer. Later still, from far behind, the faint cawing of a crow. Rod knew that these were the calls of Standing Bear, flanking their route and signalling his farewell. The woodsman also knew this, but Colonel Buckner remained placidly unaware of it.

"Damme, sir!" he chafed to the border man. "From the lad's expression you'd think we were dragging him away to captivity instead of rescuing him from it."

"That's the way it goes, Colonel," said the borderer. "I've seed it many the time."

"But I can't account for any such condition of

mind on the part of one in whose veins runs Buckner blood. He's a Buckner of Virginia."

"Right now he's a young Shawnee of the Injun country," the frontiersman chuckled.

CHAPTER III

Standing Bear, a tall young warrior, paced thoughtfully along the forest trail. He halted as another towering savage, taller and more powerfully built than himself, stepped forth in his path. The face of the Shawnee lighted with recognition.

"It is good to look upon Talk-with-birds again," he said in greeting. "This is but the third time in five years that my brother has come to visit in the lodge of his mother Winnebanca."

"But I am come not to visit," Buckner said. "I come with words that will bring heaviness to my heart and to that of my brother."

"I feared it," said Standing Bear.

"It is written that Talk-with-birds must fight in the camps of the Long-knives," Buckner stated.

"A walnut and a white birch, springing from different seeds, sprouted so close together that as they grew their bodies became as one. No longer than two nights ago, I placed a log of this double tree upon my campfire. Instead of burning to an ash as one, the wood of the walnut and the birch separated as the blaze ate into them and they burned to an ash separately, as they had sprouted. Therefore, I am prepared," the Shawnee stated. "But even so, the heart of Standing Bear is on the ground to know

that his brother lifts his knife against the Shawnees."

"It is because the white men now fight among themselves and the Shawnees are about to lift the hatchet with those who seek our scalps," Buckner explained.

"The Redcoats promised to sweep the Long-knives from the land and return it to the Shawnees for so long as the sun shall rise in the East," the Shawnee said.

"The Shawnees have listened to the false hooting of the grouse," Buckner prophesied.

"It may be," Standing Bear conceded. "Our great chief, Cornstalk, believes that the promises of all white nations are no more enduring than marks made upon the water of the Ohio. Cornstalk says the red peoples have exhausted themselves fighting against each other in white man's quarrels. He now counsels the Shawnees to stand back and let the white men fight it out among themselves. Then whoever wins, there will be fewer to fight the Shawnees, who will meanwhile grow strong. With that in mind, our chief, Cornstalk, with Red Hawk and others, has gone to the Long-knives to try and arrange for peace."

"He is a wise chief," Buckner said. "Let us hope that the Great Spirit guides the tongue of Cornstalk."

"But the Shawnees believe that even though they like the Redcoats little, fighting is our only chance. Whether we fight or not, the Long-knives will try to drive us into the setting sun and the Shawnees

will vanish from the earth," the Shawnee predicted.

"And if the Long-knives do not fight they will become the slaves of the Redcoats, which is worse than vanishing from the earth," Buckner pointed out.

"I can see it," Standing Bear said logically. "As brothers, our eyes can follow the flight of the bird and the tracks of the bear at the same time and know that each of them pursues the course ordained for it by Manitou. We are warriors, Brother, and we know that sometimes these things are written."

"It is so," Buckner agreed. "But Talk-with-birds could not find it in his heart to lift the hatchet against the Shawnees without telling his brother. Until the sun shall rise and set twice again, we are brothers. Then you must tell the Shawnees that henceforth we are enemies."

"It is done," Standing Bear said sadly. "Winnebanca and the little White Fawn will wish to see you for this last time. I will send them to you here when the moon is an hour high. We shall meet again in the lodge of our mother when peace shall come again and we can once more greet as brothers, unless it is written that before that time our scalps shall hang in the wigwams of our enemies."

On the same year that Daniel Boone and a few companions first invaded the wilderness of Kentucky, a lone adventurer, Ebenezer Zane, pressed on into the wilds of Western Virginia, erected a cabin and remained to hunt, trap and dodge the savages of the Ohio. Upon his return to the settlements his tales

of the country of his lone-wolf wanderings induced his three brothers and a number of friends to return with him to that fair region.

When the intrepid little band had arrived within a short distance of Ebenezer Zane's trapping cabin, one of the men, looking about him, suddenly drew his tomahawk and blazed the bark from a huge tree.

"Tomahawk Rights," he said to Ebenezer. "It's the best piece of land I ever saw."

Thus did he announce his intention of settling there. This was the accepted method by which settlers who penetrated unsurveyed wilderness took possession of the land. Four corner trees were blazed and the name or mark of the claimant carved thereon, the boundary lines blazed out and the settler built his cabin.

The three remaining Zane brothers elected to take up adjacent land. The other members of the party also filed tomahawk rights in the vicinity and Ebenezer Zane took up residence in the cabin from which he had hunted in '69 and '70. This decision was destined to result in the founding of Wheeling, West Virginia, as Boone's wanderings beyond the Cumberlands were to result in the ultimate settlement of Kentucky.

The Zane colony flourished from the very start. Other land-hungry souls followed in the wake of the hardy founders of the settlement. Other colonies sprang up for miles around. Virginia rose with her sister colonies against the tyranny of England. News of the war drifted to these settlements of the far

frontier, together with rumors that the British were outfitting expeditions to capture them. Then the border woodsmen began to return from the Indian country, falling back upon the settlements. Those hardy souls, hardly less wild than the animals they hunted, living their lives beyond even the most isolated settlers' cabins, knew intimately the savage and his ways. Ominous activities in the wilderness of the Ohio, they said, presaged a widespread uprising, though where the blow would fall none could predict.

Then two horsemen arrived at Ebenezer Zane's —a border woodsman named Gilpin and a middle-aged Virginia gentleman, Colonel John Buckner.

"Well, Buckner," Zane greeted, wondering why his visitor should have left the vast Buckner estates of Great Oaks and traveled to this farthest frontier post, "aren't you a few hundred miles from your usual haunts?"

"I am, sir," Buckner agreed. "Zane, by any chance has my nephew, Rodney Buckner, been seen here recently?"

"Rodney? No. What would he be doing here? Isn't he at Great Oaks?"

Pacing the floor, Buckner shook his head. "Five years ago Gilpin, here, accompanied me to a Shawnee town to ransom him. Since then he has been schooled in the pursuits of a Virginia gentleman. He is powerful as a young stallion, rides to hounds like a demon, sir, and his skill with a musket, sword and duelling pistol is nothing short of uncanny."

"To say nothing of his aptitude with scalping knife and tomahawk," Gilpin added, "at which I've seldom laid an eye on his equal."

"That is exactly the difficulty," Buckner said. "For all the fact that he has acquired to an amazing degree the graces that are fitting to a Buckner of Virginia, his long years among the savages have left their indelible mark. He still refers to some Shawnee as his brother. On two occasions in the past he has simply disappeared, to return months later to report that he had made a pilgrimage to the lodge of his foster mother. I am at a loss to account for it."

"Nothing difficult to understand about that, Cunnel," Gilpin said. "Whites take easy to redskin ways after a taste of it. I was thar with Boquet's army at the close of the Pontiac War, when the varmints agreed by treaty to deliver all white captives. Scores of them fled west toward the Illinois country to avoid being delivered. Thar was upwards of three hundred brought to camp. Many a touching reunion amongst friends took place thar, and many a tearful parting when captives was pried loose from redskin families. Many a one made a run for it back to the Injun towns—men to their squaws, women to rejoin their bucks and babies, children to the lodges of their foster parents. It seems to come natural, Cunnel, to them as has had a taste of free an' easy life in the redskin towns."

"No doubt," the colonel assented impatiently. "But this boy has Buckner blood in his veins."

"It don't take but a mite of rovin' wild in the

forest to l'arn the blue-bloodedest colt that was ever foaled to jump the pasture fence after he's been captured and confined ag'in," Gilpin pointed out. "Some of the best blood in all the colonies has gone Injun and is living out thar among the reds. And speaking of blood, don't forget Izaak Zane."

It was common knowledge that the fifth Zane brother, Izaak, having been captured by Indians at an early age, thereafter had refused to return to civilization. Married to the daughter of a famous Wyandotte chief, he had risen to be a power in the Indian confederacy of the Ohio wilderness.

"It would seem, Buckner, that your nephew's restlessness would have found an outlet in taking up arms for the colonies, in common with other young men his age from the first families of Virginia," Zane suggested.

"Just so," Colonel Buckner agreed. "He listened attentively to all of the arguments advanced by soldiers and statesmen who gathered at Great Oaks to discuss the wrongs of the colonies. Then came the news that the first shot had been fired. Queer how black men know when there's something in the wind. I noticed that every field hand, some of them wild African blacks not five years from the jungles, threw up their heads like startled deer and rolled their eyes till they could have been seen at midnight. I returned to the house to see what was up and there was Rodney out on the lawn, circling about a tree with a peculiar dipping shuffle and voicing a low-pitched, singsong chant. Then he struck the tree with his tomahawk."

Both Zane and Gilpin shook with laughter.

"He'd set in at all the councils, Cunnel," Gilpin chuckled. "And when it comes to the issue he socked his tomahawk into the war post and dedicated his feet to the bloody trail. 'Twarn't but what any Shawnee brave might do."

"So I learned," Colonel Buckner agreed. "But when I returned to Great Oaks with a commission for him direct from Governor Patrick Henry, Rodney was gone. He did not intend to join the eastern armies. From the first, he has declared that the entire Indian confederacy would rise in support of the British and that there would be war on the western frontier. My own idea was that the savages who had fought with the French against the British for so many years had small love for the Redcoats."

"So they have, but they hate the settlers of Western Pennsylvania and Virginia worse," Gilpin said. "Laying aside prejudice, Cunnel, we must confess they've reason enough. The Presbyterian settlers murdered the civilized Mingoes at Connestoga and at Lancaster to the last sucking babe, then almost went to war against the Quakers because they wouldn't permit the massacre of the Moravian Delawares as well: and they did succeed in exiling the Delawares west of the Ohio. Then right here on the Ohio, Cresap's men at one point and Daniel Greathouse's at another, set on various parties of friendly Injuns during peace times and murdered the lot of them, including the hull family of Logan, the great Mingo chief who'd never been anything but

a fast friend to the whites. That set Logan's feet on the warpath with all the weight of the allied tribes behind him. The sounds of that ain't scassly died off the air yet when we declar' war against England. Regardless of what provocation the settlers was laborin' under, and they was great, you could hardly expect the savages to take up the tomahawk on the side of the colonists. Rod knowed that, Cunnel, as does Zane, here, and every woodsman on the border."

"Yes, it is bound to come," Zane agreed. "After Pennsylvania placed a bounty on Indian scalps, regardless of age or sex, ten years or more ago, white scalp hunters neglected to be very particular as to what hair they lifted. The settlers had suffered ample provocation; but when they began to retaliate for Indian outrages by the wholesale murder of harmless Christianized Indians, at the very best it showed damned poor judgment and has cost the lives of five settlers for every savage that has gone down in resulting wars. And Rodney was correct in declaring that there would be war on the frontier."

"Probably," Buckner assented. "He left word that he had gone to the Indian country—that he did not wish to take up arms against the Shawnees without first informing his brother. A piece of romantic folly! There is such a thing as carrying chivalrous practice too far! One cannot employ the code of a Virginia gentleman in dealing with savages! I make no doubt that his precious Indian brother has already scalped him."

"Much as you've soldiered, Cunnel," Gilpin said,

"you've learned mighty little about the nature of the savages. About as much as the average army officer knows about redskins," he added reflectively.

"The business of an army officer is to fight the savages, not to understand them," Buckner retorted stiffly.

"Which is why the best of regular troops has always proved so easy for the redskins to cut down like sheep when fighting in the Injun country," Gilpin insisted. "Say what you please, Cunnel, and stick up with what false pride you will for the superiority of the white soldier, cold fact proves that an Injun campaigning the yellow-hides is more than a match, man for man, for the best-trained European soldiers. Because why? Well, the idea of war is to defeat the enemy and take his life while keepin' your own hair on your head. Correct?"

"Certainly," Buckner assented.

"Well, the redskin lives up to the principle instead of the theory. He takes cover behind log, rock or tree, with no more than his topknot showing, from which p'int of vantage he picks off his enemy as if he's potting turkeys. The white soldier is trained to stand in line and fire volleys, breast high, at the general landscape. Mighty effective, maybe, when poured into massed troops, but as aimless as throwing sand at a mark when used against scattering foes, each of which has no more than an eyeball and his trigger finger showing. Meanwhile, the reds pot the soldiers like shooting down deer at a salt lick."

"Well! Well! What would you?" the Colonel demanded testily.

"I'd larn the soldiers to take cover instead of insisting that it's cowardly to do it. I once heered an Ottawa chief exhorting his braves. 'When the soldiers take cover,' he says, 'reload your guns and wait. The officers will stride up and down and prod each hiding soldier with his sword and tell him to stand in the open and fight like a man. As they step forth to fight like men, we will shoot them down as fat turkeys fall from the roost. Give the officers time and they will drive all the men forth to be killed.' Yes, Cunnel, I've heared many a wily red chief address his braves in similar fashion."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Colonel Buckner snorted scornfully.

"He is absolutely right, Buckner," Zane declared. "It has been demonstrated often enough, before Braddock's time and since."

"Is a Virginian to skulk behind a tree?" Buckner demanded, still unconvinced.

"Why not?" Gilpin queried. "We build forts to fight from behind their shelter. Why, then, in the open, should a man not use a tree? After all, a stout tree is no more than an individual fort and serves the same purpose. After building a blockhouse, Cunnel, you sartinly wouldn't drive your men outside to fight before the walls instead of from behind them. Why, then, do you drive a soldier out to fight with his back to a tree instead of with his belly pressed close behind it? 'Tis an amazing inconsistent scheme,

to my way of reasoning. But the redskins approve of it."

"But all that is neither here nor there at the moment," Colonel Buckner declared. "It doesn't alter the fact that my nephew is out there many days' travel in the heart of the Indian country. And with rumors afloat that the whole of the Ohio wilderness is aflame with war talk."

"I wouldn't fret, Cunnel," Gilpin advised. "He knows savages and their ways down to the ground and he'll know what they're up to long before we get word of it. He'll slip through, Cunnel, safe as a snake through a briar patch."

A man appeared at the door.

"A lone savage paddled acrost the Ohio river five miles up, Colonel Zane," he said. "But he give those of us that was out for him the slip and headed this way."

There was a sudden shout and Zane left the cabin swiftly as his roving eye noted two men, their muskets trained upon a large maple that stood at the head of a shallow depression a hundred yards from the house.

"Zane," said one of the men as he reached them. "If thar ain't a cussed savage behind that tree! He must have snuck up that draw on his belly and we seed him flit behind that maple. He shouted that he's white—but I'll take my oath he ain't."

A tall, powerfully built savage stepped from behind the tree and held up one hand, palm outward, in token of his peaceful intentions, then advanced at Colonel Zane's signal. He was naked from the waist

up. A tomahawk, scalping knife and bullet pouch hung at the belt of his leggings, and a powder horn was slung by a thong across his shoulders.

"Well, Rodney!" Colonel Zane said after the warrior had announced his identity. "No wonder you felt it best to make a sneak for it to get here. Any settler would have shot you down on sight for a savage. I would myself."

"Yes, Colonel Zane," Rod agreed. "While among the Shawnees I spent so much time in the sun with nothing on but a clout that my hide was tanned to the same shade as theirs. It never did quite fade out and it only requires a few days in the sun to darken it again to the proper shade; then I can pass for a savage in any Indian camp."

Colonel Zane nodded. Even the rugged features, the high and prominent cheek bones, the powerful nose and black eyes could pass for those of some savage chief.

"The whole Indian confederacy is rising," Rod informed him. "The Delawares will not go out because those on the Muskingum are steadfastly opposed to war. Cornstalk may keep the Shawnees neutral. But all the others have gone out. Already the trails are crowded with war parties pressing this way. The plan is to strike every frontier point at once in a general war. I made myself known to a certain Wyandotte chief and he urged me to hasten here to warn you. Already he had sent secret word to Fort Pitt, requesting that all settlers be warned."

"Indian he may have become and so remained for

years," Colonel Zane said, "but thank God that Izaak Zane has never betrayed his own blood and people. Is it true that Governor Hamilton has offered a price for every settler's scalp?"

"So the savages declare," Rod affirmed.

The kindliness vanished from Zane's face, leaving it hard as granite as he cursed Hamilton, the Hair-buyer.

"Are Americans considered no better than vermin by this bloody scoundrel who sets these red wolves of the forest upon our women and children? He places a bounty upon our heads as if we were beasts of prey!"

He led the way to the house where Colonel Buckner still paced the floor. The latter's gaze focussed upon the features of the savage.

"By the gods!" he roared, with a mixture of anger and relief. "What the devil do you mean by such a masquerade? Naked from the waist up and your head shaved like a Mingo buck's! Nothing left but a scalp lock!"

"It was that or lose it all," the younger man smiled back.

"No doubt," the uncle conceded. "And I'm glad to have you back, savage or not. I have your commission into the colonial armies in my pocket, signed by Patrick Henry."

The young warrior shook his head.

"Thanks, Uncle John, and my regrets at the same time. I'd rather act independently and had thought of collecting a little band of border woodsmen to

patrol the frontier for small war parties of savages. They will fight without pay and shift for themselves."

"Well! Well! If you prefer to fight as a savage instead of as a gentleman and an officer, I suppose it doesn't matter greatly, so long as your arm is lifted for the colonies," Colonel Buckner conceded gruffly. "Spare no expense. The Buckner purse strings are open to you."

Gilpin and the two Buckners rode on, warning settlers as they traveled. Two days later they arrived at Donaldson's farm, where a blockhouse had been erected for the protection of the three families whose cabins stood in a big meadow. Donaldson had been warned. The dozen or so families that had settled within a radius of eight or ten miles were arriving to take up quarters in the blockhouse. All along the frontier, the border woodsmen had been drawing in, falling back upon the outermost fringe of settlements. Perhaps a score of these hardy souls had collected near Donaldson's. Adept as panthers at prowling the wilderness alone for years on end, accustomed since infancy to having death dog their every footstep as persistently as a shadow, this brotherhood of the border fringe took all such matters as a part of the day's affairs.

CHAPTER IV

It was at Donaldson's that Rod Buckner heard the news that was destined irrevocably to align the Shawnees against the colonists. A man had crossed to the Indian country on a scouting expedition and had been slain by savages. In retaliation, the garrison at Fort Randolph had mutinied against its commanding officers and had slain Cornstalk, his son, Chief Red Hawk and the other Shawnee delegates of peace.

The frontiersmen had started out from Donaldson's to scout for Indian sign. The savages, suspecting that there would be scouts posted on the side toward the Indian country, had detoured widely under forced march and had covered sixty miles in a day and a night to strike Donaldson's from the opposite direction. But they failed to reach it before dawn. When that dread hour, the favorite for Indian attacks, had passed, the families of the three cabins in the meadow returned to their chores while the outlying families that had taken up quarters in the blockhouse remained in its vicinity.

Buckner had covered his shaven skull with a coonskin cap and borrowed a jacket to cover his naked torso. The jacket was too tight and it cramped him and hindered the play of the rippling muscles of his

arms and shoulders but no more suitable garment was available. An hour after dawn he set off with Gilpin for a prowl through the adjacent forest on the chance that a war party of savages had eluded the vigilance of the border scouts.

"All looks innocent enough," Buckner said, as they neared the edge of the forest. "But both you and me know that a bit of woodland can appear devoid of all life by so much as the flirt of a squirrel's tail and yet shelter a hundred painted braves. 'Tis the custom of the redskins, and one which the whites would do well to emulate. When white soldiers attempt to surprise an Indian camp, it's like stalking a wily buck deer in an oxcart loaded with empty wine casks; and works as well. I'll veer to the left, and do you bear off to the right."

Rod's advance was the reverse of hasty. His eyes were not those of a civilized person, trained merely to record a given scene as a whole, but those of a savage, alertly searching out the essential details beneath the broad sweep of the general view—trained to detect the mottled snake on the moldy floor of the thicket, the sunlight dappling down through the leaves upon the spotted coat of a sleeping fawn, the nesting grouse whose colors merged into the shed leaves and brush stalks of her chosen habitat. Nor did it escape his mind that the heavy branches halfway up the trunks of mighty trees afforded excellent lurking spots for redskin scouts.

He had not progressed more than two hundred yards into the forest before his keen eye noted that

the tip of a single feather sprouted from a down log a musket shot ahead of him. A shed feather might have floated down that way, quill end first, and lodged there in the bark of the prostrate trunk—or it might be woven into the scalp lock of a brave. He halted and glanced aloft as if watching for a squirrel. Then his leisurely survey swept the forest ahead and on either hand. The trunk of one tree, rather small, seemed to swell almost imperceptibly on one side from about the height of a man's belt to the bulge of his chest. Over to the right a bush twitched sharply, yet there was no wind, and there was no bird hopping alone in it. The woods were still—too still.

Buckner looked to the powder in his priming pan, then lined down the long barrel of his rifle at the peculiar bulge on the tree. The roar of his rifle was accompanied by a wild screech and a volley of French oaths as a form tumbled from behind the tree. Even at that distance Rod thought that he recognized the convulsed features of the burly French trader, Benoit, whose face still haunted his thoughts as the model of all that was monstrous. The glimpse was but fleeting, however, for almost with the report he had whirled and fled with the speed of a deer.

Instantly, the wood that had been devoid of sound and motion but a second past became an inferno of savage yells and almost half a hundred dark forms sprang to motion. Every down-log, bush and tree trunk seemed to disgorge a painted brave. Buckner leaped from side to side with the planting of each

foot, his course resembling the corkscrew flight of a jacksnipe when first flushed from a bog. The musket balls of the foremost of his pursuers flew wide of the mark.

As he darted from the edge of the timber he could see the settlers tumbling from their cabins and fleeing toward the blockhouse. Women ran with babes in their arms. Men snatched up young children. Rod did not overtake the rearmost of them until just outside the fort. He scooped up a six-year-old youngster in his stride and entered as ready hands slammed the gates while the foremost savages were yet a musket shot away.

The enraged warriors rushed up to the very walls, hoping to gain an entrance before the defense could be organized. Some even thrust muskets through loopholes from the outside and discharged them into the fort. But such settlers as had come in from isolated cabins and taken up quarters in the fort had manned the loopholes at the first alarm and now poured a hot fire upon the assailants while those who had just arrived, breathless, from the cabins of the clearing were stationing themselves. For twenty minutes the battle raged fiercely and the film of powder smoke obscured the vision of those at the loopholes. Under cover of this, the savages retired, bearing with them their own dead and wounded.

There were but few over thirty defenders to hold the fort and prevent the swarm of women and children from becoming a prey to the savages. But that number would be sufficient, Rod Buckner thought,

barricaded behind log walls while the Indians must fight in the open. He was glad that it was a block-house fight.

The savages, numbering not many more than the defenders, had retired to just beyond effective musket shot and from there reviled the whites as cowards who feared to give battle in the open. Then there occurred an instance of the unaccountable recklessness and lack of strategy which seemed to characterize the affrays between the savages and the settlers of progressive frontiers for two hundred years.

There was a sudden crowding of defenders behind the gates. Others, believing that an order to charge had been given, hastened to join them. There was a sudden rush of cheering settlers from the gates. Rod, aghast at the audacity of it, nevertheless followed.

Some one succeeded in retaining a mere handful of defenders within the fort. Rod made out the form of his uncle among those ahead as the cheering whites made their spirited charge. The warriors, firing their muskets at the advancing whites, retreated slowly. Then the inevitable occurred. There was a sudden tremendous yell of savage triumph. The landscape swarmed with painted demons that appeared as if by magic on every hand. Every rock and shrub seemed suddenly transformed into a warrior. More than a hundred strong, they closed in upon the front and both flanks of the charging party. The charge was transformed into a terrible affray, in which each little group of settlers fought desperately to regain the fort. It was now clubbed musket against toma-

hawk. Here and there a saber flashed, while above all the clash of arms rose the demoniac whoops of the infuriated savages.

Rod Buckner was near the rear of the rallying party so did not feel the full brunt of the first desperate rush of the savages as they hurled the foremost settlers back upon those in the rear. A brawny savage charged down upon him from the flank. A sweeping blow of Rod's musket was delivered with such force as to strike down the uplifted arm of the savage and crush his skull. But the movement had caused the too-tight jacket to hitch up and bind his bulging muscles; and as he whirled to swing the musket back in a left-hand blow at the head of another assailant, the binding of his muscles deflected his aim and the force of his own swing jerked him off balance. The tomahawk of the savage would have found his skull save for the fact that a powerful settler slashed so viciously with a saber as to almost behead the dusky assailant.

With a single wrench, Buckner stripped off the restricting jacket and plucked the tomahawk from his belt. His coonskin cap had fallen from his head. His uncle, wielding a saber as if it weighed no more than a straw, was falling back, hotly pressed by two savages. With a single leap, Rod passed the elder Buckner and struck down the nearest warrior with his tomahawk. Half consciously, he noted a fleeting look of horrified surprise in the eyes of the brave just before the iron blade found his skull. The elder Buckner, thus relieved, struck down his other antagonist,

then whirled, breathing heavily, as if about to lunge at his nephew with the saber.

"To the fort!" Rod shouted above the turmoil of battle.

The older man stared for a split second, then turned and made off toward the blockhouse while Rod fell in behind him. Three settlers had cleaned up the few remaining warriors in the immediate vicinity. They, too, were running toward the fort. Rod had taken no more than three steps when, a dozen yards off on the flank, he observed a man, garbed in a greenish cloth jacket, stooping above a prostrate settler as if to lift him.

He leaped to help the man and it was not until he was within two yards that his startled gaze detected the fact that the stooping man was not aiding the settler but was scalping him. As the man rose, knife in one hand and the dripping scalp in the other, Rod knew him for a British ranger. The latter, instead of preparing to defend himself, widened his thick lips in a grin. Then sudden recognition of the fact that he was about to be attacked showed in his eyes and he half lifted his knife. Buckner's own surprise had been so great that, prepared to help a friend, he was scarcely set to strike an enemy. He had time but for a swift back-hand stroke. The pipe end of his tomahawk found the spot when the man's nose met his forehead and he went down like a felled ox. The whole affair had lasted less than twenty seconds. His uncle, running between two settlers, was but a few yards away and Rod sped after him. He

overhauled the trio easily with his greater speed and was only some six feet behind his uncle when one of the flanking settlers glanced over his shoulder. With a wild oath, the man whirled and swung his musket at Rod's face. Instinctively, he ducked, but the weapon struck him a glancing upward blow high on the forehead and knocked him flat upon his back. A flickering consciousness remained to him as feet trampled past. Dimly, he heard the sounds of combat and the vengeful whoops of the savages.

Then he was seized by powerful hands, his shoulders were lifted and he felt his moccasin-shod feet trailing swiftly over the ground. At last this peculiar style of locomotion ceased and he was deposited on the ground. His returning sight focussed waveringly upon branches of trees with the blue sky above. Feebly he passed a hand over his ringing head and it came away wet and crimson. Heavy breathing from close at hand drew his flickering eyes to a badly wounded savage sprawled near him. There were other still dark shapes on the ground near by. Several wounded warriors sat with their backs propped against trees. One brave tottered about on unsteady legs and chanted his death song. One of the prone men uttered a groan and passed a hand across his face. Rod's fascinated gaze riveted on the bloody features of the British ranger and a chill tingled along his spine.

The shock cleared his reeling brain. The whole picture unrolled before his mind's eye. Once he had shed jacket and headgear, he had appeared to all

eyes alike as a warrior. That fleeting look of surprise in the eyes of the brave he had cut down had been occasioned by the belief that he was assailed by an ally when unprepared to defend himself. The ranger, too, had made no move to defend himself until the last-second realization had galvanized his knife arm in a motion that was too late. And the settler had struck Rod down under the impression that he was a savage in hot pursuit of the elder Buckner. Some warriors, true to the Indian custom of carrying off their own dead and wounded, had dragged him from the field as a stricken ally.

He rose totteringly, the blood from his forehead dripping down across his face and chest. A wounded brave called out to him in the Wyandotte tongue.

"Do you die, Warrior?"

Buckner grunted a negative and moved off through the forest. It behooved him to put distance between himself and that spot before the savages, drawing off for a conference, should discuss the events of the charge and talk with the recovering Kemper. He must find some of those woodsmen who were scouting towards the west and have them rally the others to relieve the fort. But he would have to approach any of the frontiersmen with caution or he would be shot down without warning as a savage. He struck a loping gait that jarred his aching head; but the throbbing grew less instead of worse. At the end of half an hour, as he loped along a forest trail, he discerned swift motion in the forest a musket shot ahead. Then there was not so much as a flicker. The

forest was silent and undisturbed. But he had seen enough in that one glimpse to inform him that the men ahead were attired in buckskin. They were woodsmen, not savages. He knew that one of their number, observing his approach, had given a signal and all had taken cover as expertly as partridges—an ideal ambush in case he was the foremost of a party of savages. He knew, too, that far out on either flank, men were circling to cut off his retreat.

He lifted his voice in a hail and stepped from behind his tree with uplifted palm.

" 'Tis Buckner," Gilpin told the woodsmen. "No doubt sent as a messenger, since he could slip through the savages as one of themselves."

The forest ahead suddenly swarmed with moving figures as the woodsmen left cover and advanced. They were on their way to relieve the fort and did not so much as halt, questioning him briefly as they traveled.

"The varmints had me cut off from the fort when you stirred them out with that first shot," Gilpin said. "So I made tracks to get help. You're bloody as a gutted buck. Are you bad hurt?"

"Only nicked, as you'd bark a squirrel," Buckner assured him. Briefly, he recounted the occurrence.

"Your scalp must have been ordained by Manitou to ornament your skull instead of a redskin's girdle," Gilpin declared. "Otherwise your hair and your head would have parted company the instant a friend was so obliging as to knock you into the hands of the enemy. Remarkable fortunate, I'd name it. So

they was lured into making a sortie! When will they l'arn? But these are the lads that will give the red miscreants hell," he added, gesturing to either side.

The woodsmen had spread out to advance in skirmish formation, every man of them ready to take cover on the instant in case of attack, and they forged ahead with a slack-kneed lope that covered the maximum distance with the minimum of exertion. They leaped over windfalls and across narrow draws as nimbly as deer, taking all in their stride. Theirs was the lithe power of agile wild beasts, not the muscle-bound strength of the hard-toiling settler.

Back in the blockhouse the few defenders—only twelve in number after the return of the handful who had escaped with their lives from that reckless sortie—were waging a stanch and determined battle to prevent the overwhelming horde of savages from storming the fort. Theirs was a desperate plight. Pioneer women were standing to the loopholes along with the men, but it seemed merely a matter of time.

Then suddenly there came a wild cheer, savage as any that the redskins themselves could have uttered. From the forest there poured a score of buckskin-clad figures. Bounding like panthers, these men bore down upon the rear of the hostiles. The very ferocity of the charge scattered the savages; they knew the terrible fighting qualities of these border rangers. And though many warriors rallied to oppose the advance, they were shot down by the unerring rifles or cut down by tomahawks, and the borderers fought their way into the fort.

The enraged savages withdrew to beyond musket shot. With the walls defended by that terrible little band, there would be less than no chance to storm the fort. They hung round for another day, then retreated toward the Ohio.

For a week, the smoke of burning cabins rose the entire length of the frontier. But in the main, those who had once occupied them were safe within the blockhouse walls. Chagrined attacking parties, having surrounded cabins in the night, made their rush at dawn only to discover that their intended prey had flown. Larger forces, commanded by British officers and some of them accompanied by British rangers, assaulted the larger settlements, only to find the inhabitants on guard. Not one important post fell prey to the savages during that first great border-long offensive.

Years later, in recognition of the invaluable services rendered by a certain Wyandotte chief in sending out those warnings to the settlements, the new American government granted Izaak Zane a tract of the best land in the Ohio wilderness. On this great estate, surrounded by his large Indian family, he resided regally throughout his life, and the town of Zanesfield was founded on his holdings.

As the savages fell back from the Donaldson farm, there was a general retreat all along the frontier. The border men, acting as self-appointed scouts, clung to the wake and on the flanks of such retreating war parties to make certain that this was not merely a ruse on the part of the wily hostiles. But it

was an actual and frontier-long retreat. The Indians hurried on to their various towns on the Muskingum, the Scioto, the Sandusky, the Miami and the Maumee for the winter.

The hair-buying campaign of Hamilton had not ended, had only just begun. But it had exerted exactly the opposite of the intended effect. Instead of rousing terror that would lead to the speedy capitulation and surrender of the entire frontier, it roused a storm of wrath. Those who had been too far from the scene of operations in the East to have felt their effects or to have taken any very serious interest in the war, now took the colonial cause to their hearts. Hard-riding planters from isolated Virginia farms dropped their ploughs and headed toward the frontier. Placid yeomen of quiet farming communities of Pennsylvania shouldered their muskets and plodded stolidly toward the West to have a look at those who would pay a price for the scalps of their women and their children. Lukewarm adherence to the colonial cause was fanned overnight into fanatic partisanship. These tidings drifted to the harrassed armies of the East and they knew that the far frontier had espoused their cause. Names began to stand forth as synonymous with sagacious and valorous leadership, individual heroism and desperate exploits in the western wilderness. Boone, Kenton, Zane, McCullock, and other names became familiar words upon men's tongues. And presently the name of Buckner was mentioned among those others.

CHAPTER V

Buckner glanced about the men who were roasting bits of venison over the coals of the morning cook fires. A wild-looking lot, these few men that made up Buckner's Rangers. There were no more than a dozen in camp, the others being out in various directions scouting for Indian sign. It was seldom that the rangers bivouacked twice in the same spot. The very nature of their work demanded constant shifting and a wide range of movement. Never numbering more than twenty men, Buckner's rangers nevertheless had proved a terrible scourge to marauding parties of savages that penetrated east of the Ohio to prey among the scattered settlers. There was no question of commissary and supply, of bedding, shelters and other cumbersome equipment to be transported when these men campaigned. They moved about with the freedom of wolves, were scarcely less wild and fierce, in fact, and rationed themselves as they traveled. Any man among them was capable of living indefinitely off the country.

All of them had lived among the Indians during peace times and had fought against them in many a bloody affray during war times. Some had hunted Indians for the Pennsylvania bounty as trappers might hunt for wolves. They thought no more of

lifting a redskin's scalp than of stripping the pelt from a mink.

Two men came swinging through the timber toward the camp. Two brothers, Thomas and Archibald Herne, reported that a small war party of about twenty-five savages had crossed the Ohio ten miles south during the night and had headed eastward. Within five minutes of their arrival, the woodsmen had broken camp and were traveling south.

A few minutes later, Gilpin and another ranger reached the deserted camp from the north, where they had been scouting during the night. Gilpin inspected a crude drawing hastily sketched with charcoal on a slab of hickory bark.

"They head south for ten miles along the river, then turn east on a trail," he said. "How long have they been gone?"

The other woodsman, inspecting the deserted camp while Gilpin deciphered the map, pointed to a piece of half-cooked meat discarded near the smoking embers. Flies swarmed round it but there was only one cluster of blow-eggs upon it.

"Not more'n fifteen minutes," he said. "That meat was too sizzlin' hot for them flies to blow it first off," and he pointed to several creeping, disabled blow flies whose temerity in attempting to lay their eggs upon too hot meat had been their undoing. "But it don't take but a mighty short space for meat to cool, and ten minutes after it's cool it would be plastered with fly-blows entire."

Lacking that indisputable evidence as to the re-

cency of the rangers' departure, he would have found other signs revealing what he wished to know.

"Then we'll head straight down river and overhaul them, 'stid of angling southeast to cut off," Gilpin said, and the other man nodded. An hour later they overtook the main body.

Before starting east on the trail of the marauding party of Hurons, hunting shirts and fur caps were cached and each man stood forth garbed only in moccasins, leather leggings and breechclout. From the paints that were an indispensable part of every warrior's equipment, each one daubed face and torso according to his individual fancy. But the war plumes which each attached to his scalp lock were the same, two feathers for each, one pure white, the other bright scarlet. And each man made some sort of white mark between his shoulder blades and another on his chest. With these means of identification, such cool and experienced fighters as these woodsmen would never be guilty of shooting a friend in the course of any forest engagement when both friends and foes were scattered and treed.

It was almost certain that the war party would post scouts in the rear to report if militia had cut the trail and were following. The two Herne brothers ranged far out to either flank and then moved some three hundred yards ahead before the main body started. Two others followed them at half that distance. Then Buckner and Gilpin took the trail, the others following at a distance of over a hundred yards in the rear. An Indian scout, posted to guard

the back track of the war party, would be puzzled at the approach of the two savages on the trail. Even though suspicious, he could not be certain that they were not two allies following along to join the marauders. And any such hesitancy would cause his downfall when dealing with such men as these.

Buckner held to the trail without difficulty, though it would have been invisible to untrained eyes. A few scuffed leaves here, broken moss there, bent blades of grass and other such minor disturbances were sufficient. When the sun was five hours high the trail no longer passed through open glades but veered aside to skirt all such openings.

"Five hours behind 'em," Gilpin commented. "It had growed light when they got this far and they quit showing themselves in the openings and circled round through the timber. We'll be running up on a scout any time now."

Buckner nodded.

"There's one man with them that's neither savage nor woodsman," he said. "He puts his weight first on his heels, heavy, each step, after the fashion of the whites, while as you know, both savages and woodsmen step first on the ball of the foot and the heel track is lightest."

"So I'd observed," said Gilpin. "The man must jar his own frame to the teeth every step, landing heel-first as solid as he apparently does. What's a man who's no woodsman doing in moccasins on a redskin raid of this kind? A Britisher that aims to be dropped behind over here as a spy, think you?"

"I've been wondering. If he's disguised as an American settler, yes. If he's wearing his uniform, no. The latter would mean no more than that some ambitious soldier was eager to learn more of the ways of Indian campaigning."

The trail led along the crest of a low timbered ridge. The two scouts came presently to where the savages had broken their single-file formation to cluster at one spot, which was marked by a giant sycamore, its top shattered by lightning, that stood on the highest point of the ridge. The signs indicated that the war party had remained there for a considerable period, some of them sitting down, others sprawled flat on the ground.

Buckner lifted his voice in the single loud note of a crow as a signal for both the main body of rangers and the outflanking scouts to stand fast where they were. Then he circled the spot and picked up the trail of a single man who had ascended the slope of the ridge to join the war party at the sycamore. He followed the back track of the man and it led him down the ridge and out into a timbered flat. After following it for some three hundred yards, he came out into a bottom that had been overflowed by a creek. The land had now dried out on top and the tracks were clearly discernible.

An outflanking scout of a war party would be expected to keep track of the whereabouts of the main body and rejoin it while on the march. Yet the war party had made a lengthy halt at that giant sycamore on the ridge. Plainly, it had been a prearranged

rendezvous. Settlers with Tory leanings sometimes gave aid and information to the enemy. This affair might prove to be such a case. Carefully, Buckner inspected each track.

"One foot of a white, one foot of a savage—or a woodsman," Buckner said.

The print of the right foot indicated that the man put his weight first upon the heel of it, though but slightly. With the left, he stepped not only with the weight on the ball and toes but the heel seemed scarcely to touch the earth at all, even where the ground was soft and the toes bit deep.

"Likely he has a bruise, or a thorn in his left heel, and so favors it," Buckner mused. "In which case, even a savage would land flat or heel-first with his right to take the weight off all but the toes of his left."

There was nothing further to be learned from the tracks so he rejoined Gilpin, then uttered the notes of the crow, twice in swift succession, an interval of three seconds, then two more swift crow calls as a signal for all hands to resume march.

Not until the sun had passed the noon mark by some two hours did Buckner see anything to cause another halt. Then he stooped as if to tie a moccasin lace, accompanying the movement with a low cluck. Gilpin promptly seated himself on a down log, at which signal every man of those a hundred yards in rear took instantly to cover.

"Which way is the varmint?" Gilpin queried.

"Behind a big oak a hundred yards to the right

and ahead," Buckner informed without even glancing in that direction. "I saw only a slice of his face the width of two fingers. He's not sure about us and will draw off, keeping the tree in line with us."

Buckner raised his voice in the single piercing scream of a hawk. That note, less frequently heard than most other bird conversation in the forest, and hence less apt to be confusing, was the invariable signal among Buckner's Rangers to denote the sighting of an enemy. The outflanking scouts would not only halt but would take cover at once and keep an eye peeled for the enemy. The savage, too, would know it for a signal, since it rose from where the two men sat on the log, but he would be mystified as to its meaning. To the day of his death, Buckner seldom heard the scream of a wheeling hawk without an instinctive start to take cover and peer about for an enemy. This system of travel and signalling worked out by the rangers when on the track of a war party seldom failed to account for such scouts as the savages had left to watch on the trail.

After the space of a minute, Buckner and Gilpin rose and sauntered toward the tree that had sheltered the savage. They separated, each keeping a tree in line with the spot for protection, each alert for the slightest movement of a musket barrel from behind any cover ahead. Seeing this movement, no savage scout would doubt for an instant but that he had been discovered and was being stalked. He would draw off, taking advantage of all cover and keeping a watchful eye upon the enemies in the rear.

While thus engaged, it was almost inevitable that he would draw within range of one or another of the four scouts that traveled ahead and out in the flanks of the party. Presently a heavy report roared through the forest, accompanied by an unearthly screech. Buckner advanced to where Tom Herne was divesting a prostrate warrior of his scalp.

"Huron," Herne said. "He was sliding along, looking back to see if you was following him, and he never knowed what hit him."

Then the formation was resumed and they continued on the trail. The sun was but two hours above the western horizon when another Huron scout was bagged in like fashion. On this occasion it was Arch Herne that lifted the scalp of the hostile. Toward sundown the trail turned off up a lofty wooded ridge and the rangers called a halt for a conference.

"Thar's nothing but ridges that way for another twelve mile," volunteered a man who knew that section intimately. "Then thar's Pape's Valley—three cabins full of Papes and their kinfolks built close in a triangle. That's whar they're headed."

"Then they won't strike until morning," Buckner said. "They'll wait over; and if we follow too close we'll run up on their scouts. Better to rest up ourselves and then you can lead us well out around them."

This plan was adopted. Two hours before dawn the little force of rangers drew near Pape's farm from an oblique angle and waited in silence a half mile from the cabins. It was certain that, cover be-

ing equal, the savages would creep up from the downwind side on account of the dogs of the settlers. An hour passed, then another long span of minutes. It was beginning to show faintly gray in the east. Then a dog gave vent to an angry bark that subsided into a growl. Several other canines chimed in. It was evident that the dogs, even though unable to scent the approaching savages, had heard or sensed something to rouse them.

"They're drawin' in," Gilpin whispered.

Buckner rose and the rest followed suit. The rangers separated and glided noiselessly through the black shadows of the forest to come upon the rear of the savages. Only a slight lessening of that velvet black apprised Buckner of the fact that he was within twenty yards of the edge of the clearing. A noiseless shape moved ahead of him and disappeared. He knew that a Huron had stationed himself behind a tree at the edge of the forest. He moved silently forward to another tree. His keen ears detected an occasional rustle—no more. Not once was there so much as a metallic click of arms or equipment, yet he knew that there were around forty armed men within a few yards of him. The black pall lifted gradually until the dark bundle of cabins and the few trees left standing near them began to loom in the clearing. The dogs had quieted somewhat but gave vent to occasional uneasy growls.

Both rangers and savages knew that the occupants of those dark cabins were alert, eyes glued to loopholes, hoping that the dogs had been roused by

the passing of bear or panther and not by the stealthy approach of hostile marauders. Buckner could now discern the back of the Huron brave who peered from a tree fifteen feet ahead. A few feet to the right of the first, another warrior was stationed. The ranger chief peered closely and could discern no white mark upon the back of either brave. Besides, a ranger would not have stationed himself behind the outermost tree at the edge of the forest, but rather farther to the rear to take the attacking party from behind. He knew that by now every ranger had been stationed for a space of minutes, most of them, no doubt, having singled out a Huron apiece. They waited now only for his signal. The dogs again began their angry barking and one made a snarling rush toward the timber but whirled and retreated, growling deep in his throat. That would mean that some few of the Indians were creeping, snakelike, through the potato patch and behind woodpiles and various other covers, to be in readiness to shoot down the first persons who would emerge from the cabins and to rush the first door that was opened.

Dawn was spreading more swiftly now. Buckner stepped from behind his tree and moved in leisurely fashion toward the savage immediately ahead. The warrior whirled at the first sound but saw only a fellow brave in the vague half-light. He turned again to peer from behind his tree. Buckner swung his tomahawk and the Huron went down without a struggle.

Even before Buckner could raise his voice in the prearranged signal for the rangers to strike, some nervous occupant of one of the cabins fired at a movement outside. On the instant, the edge of the forest resounded with the war whoop of the Hurons. Eight or ten dark figures leaped up out in the clearing and charged the cabins. As the Hurons, their every faculty riveted on the scene before them, leaped from behind their trees to charge to the aid of their fellows, the rangers struck from behind. Many a brave's skull was split before he knew that an enemy was near him. Other rangers, who had not yet stalked to within tomahawking distance of their prey, shot warriors down from behind.

The red splashes from the dark bulk of the cabins revealed the loopholes from which the occupants fired upon their assailants. Savages, their lives made up of surprise and counter surprise, never remained at a disadvantage for long. A dying Huron raised the alarm halloo from the edge of the forest. On the instant, every brave in the clearing knew that the commotion of ten seconds past had not been occasioned by the advance of the main party of Hurons to help them but by a surprise attack launched against them from the rear.

They scattered for cover, flitting figures in the dim light of dawn. A voice roared out an order in the Huron tongue. It struck a familiar chord in Buckner, and the picture of Benoit's brutal face rose for a brief flash in his consciousness.

The settlers, amazed at the sudden cessation of the

turmoil outside, and peering down the barrels of their muskets for another glimpse of their recent assailants, presently witnessed a strange and incredible scene. A party of painted savages prowled all along the edge of the forest, occupied with wrenching the scalps from prostrate members of their own race. For a full minute, old man Pape stared silently at this weird performance, while from behind him sounded the breathing of terrified children. Then he straightened his tall form with a sigh of relief.

"God be praised," he gave fervent thanks. "Buckner's Rangers. Can't nothing else account for what's going on out thar. It must be Buckner's men."

Arch Herne advanced from the timber with a prisoner, his hands pinioned behind him.

"This here's likely the one as walked on his heels," he said. "I tapped him on the head, like, and tied him."

The captive, attired in the garb of the British Rangers, save for his moccasin-shod feet, wore the insignia of captain. There was something vaguely familiar about the man but Buckner could not quite place where he had seen him before. A red scar showed on the bridge of his nose and strayed across his forehead. And suddenly Buckner knew that the face was the same that he had looked upon for one second before a hasty back-hand stroke of his tomahawk had felled the Britisher during the fight at Donaldson's farm a year in the past.

Captain Kemper, the prisoner, bore his captivity

with a stoical indifference akin to that which might have characterized one of his red associates. Upon reaching the Ohio, Buckner found his presence a hindrance to the free movements of the rangers. However, there was no near-by frontier fort where the captive could be delivered into the hands of the proper authorities. The Britisher, having been taken in uniform, was eligible for exchange or parole; and Buckner, as a matter of expediency, decided to take his parole on the spot.

"Will he live up to it?" Gilpin queried doubtfully.

"He is a British officer and a gentleman," Buckner said. "An officer who violates his oath loses his honor and ceases to be a man."

That was the code of gentlemen of his day. Virginians, in particular, were extremely thin-skinned on the score of their honor. Any remark, if construed as a reflection upon one's word, courage or propriety of conduct, was more apt than not to result in a meeting at dawn. And in the case of Rod Buckner, his early training having been in the hands of fiercely proud Shawnee braves, this fire-eating code of the Virginians had fallen upon fruitful soil. Both on the British side and the colonial, there were many former officers who had taken the oath of parole. Chafe against inactivity they did, violate their word of honor they would not. Captain Kemper gladly availed himself of the privilege of parole. Buckner himself returned the officer's arms and paddled him across the Ohio.

Perhaps two weeks thereafter, some forty Pennsylvania militiamen, lounging round bivouac fires, were startled by the sharp challenge of one of their sentries from out in the night. The sentry admitted two buckskin-clad figures when the challenged parties announced themselves as Tom Herne and Buckner. They presented themselves before Captain Donner, the officer commanding the detachment. Donner was an arrogant soul of small military experience and unused to Indian campaigning, commissioned for his services in recruiting men from among the yeomen settlements of Pennsylvania. His new authority rested uneasily upon him and, extremely jealous of it, he was inclined to pattern his manner after that of the British martinets.

"Captain Donner," Buckner said. "You are camped on the trail of the little war party that sacked Martin's cabin yesterday. Do you intend to follow it?"

"I do," Donner stated.

"They have crossed the Ohio by now and I wouldn't follow them beyond it," Buckner counselled.

"And why?" Donner inquired stiffly.

"There are but ten savages in that party," Buckner said. "And when ten savages, returning from a raid, leave a trail that any but an experienced tracker can unravel, it means but one thing—that they want to be followed."

"Then their wish will be granted," Captain Donner declared.

"The country beyond the Ohio is swarming with warriors hoping that a detachment of troops will follow the trail of some returning war party," Buckner persisted. "It is a regular part of their strategy. Their scouts will watch your every move and decoy you into an ambush."

"Yet I hear that Buckner's Rangers cross to the Indian country frequently," Captain Donner declared surlily. "Where you can go with twenty men, I can go with forty."

"Thar warn't but ten reds, yet they made a squaw march of their retreat that left a trail like a hull redskin town had gone visiting," Tom Herne cut in. "It appears to me like a nice inviting highway to hell, and if I was in your boots I'd never set foot on it across the Ohio."

"One might think," Donner said harshly, "that you men were commanding this detachment, not myself."

"As scouts, we report conditions as we find them," Buckner returned, his own manner stiffening.

"Then if you will confine yourself to reporting and dispense with your assumption of authority," Donner snapped, "I will proceed to act upon my own judgment as to the best course to follow."

"Very well," Buckner returned, controlling his own mounting temper. "We were merely telling you what any border scout would tell you if there was one attached to your outfit."

He turned on his heel to leave but was deterred

as a man lounged from among the militiamen at another fire and came forward.

"Who says there's no scout?" he demanded. "Who knows more of savages and their ways than René Benoit?"

Buckner had heard that Benoit, in common with many French woodsmen, was fighting on the side of the colonists. He had discarded that fleeting impression that the man dislodged from behind the tree by his first shot at Donaldson's farm had been Benoit. Reason told him that his dislike of the man was occasioned merely by that childhood aversion that cropped up out of the past. Nevertheless, some animal sense of wariness rose from the depths to caution Buckner to rely upon his feelings rather than to depend upon reason. Woodsmen, in common with savages and the wild things, were quick to heed such obscure warnings, even when unsupported by reason. Buckner could not rid himself of a wary distrust of the man.

"You're a woodsman, Benoit," he said. "None better. What is your own verdict as to crossing into the Indian country with so small a detachment on a trail obviously left to be followed?"

"No harm in crossing, is there?" Benoit demanded, "long as I keep 'em from stumbling into a trap once we are on the far side?"

"No," Buckner conceded.

Benoit turned and walked back to his fire. Buckner's eyes met those of Herne in a quick exchange of discovery. The man, almost imperceptibly, favored his left foot in his stride. This defect did not

rise from some temporary bruise or thorn wound, as Buckner had interpreted the tracks of the lone man who had met the Hurons at the rendezvous by the giant sycamore on the ridge. It was some sort of permanent injury, as evidenced by the slack, unfilled heel of Benoit's left moccasin. The whole picture was cleared on the instant for Buckner. Benoit, while attached as a scout with various bodies of colonial militia, was giving aid to the enemy, conveying information to war parties and guiding them upon unprotected settlements while supposed to be out on lone scouts of his own. Buckner had not been mistaken in the identity of the man dislodged from behind the tree trunk at the first shot at Donaldson's farm. Neither had his senses misled him by flashing a picture of Benoit into his consciousness at the sound of that roaring voice in the dim light of dawn at Pape's clearing. That instinctive aversion had been right where reason had been at fault.

Swiftly, he acquainted Captain Donner with his conclusions. That pompous person, however, was completely unversed in sign reading. All that was of vital significance to a woodsman seemed but far-fetched nonsense to him, and he had no hesitation in declaring it so.

"Worse than absurd!" he scornfully snorted. "Suspecting a man because of a few moccasin tracks a half-hundred miles from here weeks ago."

"A woodsman's life depends every hour on not misreading the least signs in the forest about him," Buckner said. "The wiliest redskin alive cannot

cross through a hundred miles of wilderness and break his trail—strive though he may to conceal it—but what another savage or a woodsman can track him the length of it. He can leave so little sign that his tracker falls days behind him, perhaps, but lose him entirely, he cannot. Such obscure things mean to us what the printed page means to you, and are as easily interpreted. When we warn you that Benoit is a good man to watch, it is to your advantage to heed us."

He strode off into the forest with Herne and the night gave back no sound of their movements.

"Them yokels is unlarned in fighting and not one amongst 'em could distinguish between Injun sign and b'ar tracks, least of all that thick-haid who leads them," Herne said after a space. "They hail from settlements whar a musket shot ain't been heered, or a war whoop, in going on twenty year. They're stolid and subsarvient, more like European sojers, who from the cradle up ain't knowed nothing else but to obey what was told them. If Benoit leads them across the Ohio, it's for the parpose of betraying them into the hands of the savages—and they'll plod along like sheep wherever that fool Donner orders. If they was frontier settlers they'd see him in hell first."

Within the week, news reached the settlements that Donner's detachment had been cut to pieces in the wilderness across the Ohio and that only Donner and five men had made their way back. Benoit, so it was said, traveling well in advance of the outfit, had been shot down at the first fire of the savages.

CHAPTER VI

The vague, flickering glow of the dying fires did not serve even to relieve the gloom of the Indian town, much less to penetrate the somber depths of the encircling forest. The quavering falsetto of a screech owl sounded from a short distance away, followed by the harsh squawk of a night heron, then the silvery notes of a winging plover. After an interval the latter two notes of this series of bird calls were repeated.

A small figure slipped silently from a big lodge and left the village by way of a path that led through the forest. After following it for some two hundred yards the girl was halted by the sleepy twitter of a sparrow disturbed upon its roost. She twittered a soft answer and a tall form appeared on the path before her. Guided by the man's encircling arm, the slip of a girl vanished into the dense timber and presently was seated upon a down log by his side.

"How is it with you, White Fawn?" he asked in the Shawnee tongue.

"Well," she replied. "But the Shawnees miss Talk-with-birds from the lodge of his mother; and Standing Bear grieves that his brother fights in the camp of the Long-knives. White Fawn sleeps every night with her ears awake for the signal. Her eyes open at

the first note of every screech owl in the forest and her breath comes fast in hope that it will be followed by the voice of the heron and the plover twice repeated."

The man's powerful arm drew the slight form to his side in a comforting gesture.

"White Fawn is in her twelfth year," he said, "and she has forgotten the language of her people. It is well that she should return to the lodges of the white men and learn their ways."

The girl seemed to shrink in size as she expressed her fear of going among those whose ways she did not know. It could not be, she declared.

"Talk-with-birds could return to the Shawnees and would be welcomed in the lodge of his brother. Who would welcome White Fawn into their lodge among the Long-knives?"

"White Fawn would be an honored guest in the great lodge of my people, with black servants to attend her slightest wish, until such time as her own family could be located. Your own name comes no longer to your lips. White Fawn has forgotten it. But somewhere among the big villages of the white men there are those who have not forgotten. For six years their eyes have been wet with grief that you do not return to them. Talk-with-birds goes far to the West on an important mission, even to the great river that is known to the red men as the Father of the Waters. On his return, he will take White Fawn to the lodge of his people."

But she would not have it so. He recalled his own

stark terror when, at about her present age, he had been escorted from the Shawnee town by his uncle and Gilpin.

"But you will come again?" the girl sought. "Always the ears of White Fawn will be awake for the signal. At the first note of a screech owl, her heart soars aloft like the flight of an eagle. Then her heart is on the ground like the sluggish bounds of the hop-toad when the heron and the plover fail to speak twice in answer to the owl."

"I will come again," he promised. "The name of White Fawn is written deep in my heart. But it may be that I cannot come until there is peace between the Shawnees and the Long-knives. I could not have come now but I saw big war parties of Shawnees crossing the Ohio to fight the settlers of Kentucky and among them were the warriors from here; so it was safe for me to come. Manitou be with you until I come again."

Some days later a canoe, drawn by the resistless drag of the current and propelled by the rhythmic sweep of a paddle wielded by powerful arms, fled down the bosom of the Ohio. The brawny savage, muscles rippling beneath the bronzed hide of his naked torso, paddled with no apparent concern other than that of driving his frail craft onward. Nevertheless, his eyes missed no detail of the shore lines that glided past on either hand. Tier upon tier of wooded hills presently gave way to a flat that afforded sliding vistas of broad meadowland through gaps in the fringe of trees. Then the forest, dark and somber,

closed in again. Giant oaks, elms, walnuts, sycamores and hickories overhung the banks. An occasional golden or scarlet meteor flashed through the dark green field of the forest, betraying the flight of a prothonotary warbler or a cardinal. The brisk drumming of a woodpecker, the harsh cry of a crested flycatcher or the bell-like song of a wood thrush at intervals relieved the cathedral silence of the virgin forest. And always there was the hungry gurgle of the current sucking at the frail canoe and the flashing swoop of swallows skimming insects from the air above the shining river.

The man's roving glance contained not so much of wariness as of profound interest in his surroundings. Never before, even in his extensive wanderings, had he penetrated so far into the primeval wilderness. Of caution there was little immediate need. He was below any point where the scouts of the scattered settlements of Kentucky might be stationed to fire upon every prowling savage. And now, with all tribal differences buried in a general war against the Long-knives, no Indian of whatever tribe would be apt to molest another.

Well after nightfall he put ashore and moved back into the black shadows of the forest, then lighted a fire, which he would not have done had he feared a visit from savages. Its light fell upon the mighty trunks of trees that hemmed him in. This was the wilderness primeval, undisturbed throughout the ages by the hand of man. A sense of peace so complete as almost to resemble ecstasy descended

upon his spirit. Always, alone or with a few chosen companions, he was happiest when farthest removed from the haunts of civilized mankind. Originally he had declined a commission in the colonial armies for the reason that military discipline appalled him. Every fiber of his being rebelled at the restrictions of civilized life in the settlements. There was an old saying on the border: "You can't make a white man out of an Injun but you can easy make an Injun out of a white man." That saying was true. It was easier for a civilized being to revert to the primitive than for a primitive to elevate himself to the artificialities of civilization. Was he, himself, just another proof of that frontier saying, Buckner wondered? Was it his tendency to go Indian? He shrugged as if to dismiss the thought. Why concern himself with it now? What was to be written would be written. Then it occurred to him that the very manner in which he disposed of the matter was more characteristic of the Indian than of the white.

In the morning he put forth again upon the river, driving his canoe ever deeper into the unknown West. Later, he began to sleep by day and to travel only at night. Now and then a red illumination and the howling of Indian dogs revealed the location of some savage encampment. On such occasions he held close to the opposite shore and allowed his canoe to drift lest the dip of his paddle reach the sensitive ears of the Indians. He came out at last where the waters of the Ohio flowed into the turbulent tide of the mighty Mississippi.

He could make no headway against that resistless current so he cached his canoe and traveled on foot up the shores of the Father of the Waters to the mouth of the Kaskaskia, then headed up the Indian road that led along that stream. Now boldness became an essential part of his plans if they were to be crowned with success.

The old French settlement of Kaskaskia was one of the wilderness posts between Detroit and the Mississippi, permission to establish which had been granted to the French by Chicagou, the chief of the Illinois, long ago. Upon the cessation of the French and Indian wars in 1763, these posts and the territorial rights of the region had been ceded to the British. Kaskaskia was in the Illinois wilderness, so remote as to be almost beyond the realization of the American colonists of Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

General George Rogers Clark had conceived a scheme so bold as to border on the fantastic. He proposed no less than to recruit a band of hardy woodsmen, proceed secretly down the Ohio and capture the wilderness forts of Cahohia, Kaskaskia and Vincennes, thus menacing the British rear. Scouts had informed him that the scheme was feasible. Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia, before lending or withholding his support, had desired to assure himself that the thing was possible and that Clark's confidence was not based merely upon enthusiasm which might result in losing the lives of his followers to no purpose. It was at Governor Henry's solicitation that

Buckner had engaged upon his present mission of reconnaissance.

He entered the old French settlement of Kaskaskia at high noon. At his belt he wore the scalp of a white man which had been taken from the belt of a dead warrior in the seige of Wheeling a year or more before. He repaired immediately to the Indian camp just outside the village. The inmates included Meadows, Kaskaskias, Cahohias, Peorias and others, all referred to by the whites under the general title of the Illinois Indians. They crowded round him but he could not understand their tongues. However, he was skilled in the sign language which was commonly understood by all tribes of the Indian Confederacy. He informed them by signs that he was a Shawnee; that he had descended the Ohio with French traders but had left them at the Mississippi, as they intended to descend that stream. He had come by way of Kaskaskia in the hope that he might find there a stray party of Shawnees and accompany them back to his own country. The Illinois informed him by signs that there were no Shawnees in the vicinity, which knowledge greatly reassured him.

The fort just outside the settlement of Kaskaskia was garrisoned by British soldiers. The commandant, hearing that a strange Indian from the Ohio region was in the Illinois camp, summoned him for questioning.

Buckner conveyed by signs the information that in addition to the Shawnee tongue, he could converse in the Wyandotte and Delaware languages, if there

were any among the Illinois who spoke those tongues. A Peoria who had resided for some time in the Wyandotte towns years before was called in.

"I do not believe that you are a Shawnee," he began. "You look to me like a Delaware."

"I am no Delaware, as you well know," Buckner retorted. "But what concern is it of yours?"

"The Praying Delawares sit in their wigwams on the Muskingum and refuse to join the allied tribes and take up the hatchet against the Long-knives," the Peoria derided. "The Illinois stood by their brothers and painted for war."

"Perhaps they painted," Buckner retorted scornfully, "but they do not get to the wars. And even the Delawares, reading their prayer books in their wigwams on the Muskingum, are many sleeps closer to the fighting than I have seen you." He tapped the scalp at his belt negligently. "Where were you when I took this in battle against the Long-knives?"

Fiercely the warrior declared that had he been there he would have lifted not one scalp but many.

"Then return with me," the Shawnee invited. "I will lead you to where there is much hair for the taking, if your heart is stout and your arm is strong."

"I am not so sure that you took that pretty tuft in battle," said the Illinois. "Perhaps you found it on the trail where fighting men had lost it."

"Or perhaps I stole it from my baby sister," the Shawnee shrugged carelessly. "But what matters it so long as it will bring a good price in Detroit?"

This debate had been accompanied by a sketchy

pantomime of sign language sufficient to permit the few savages and French colonials present to follow the drift of it. Their amused glances informed the commandant that all was progressing nicely. Having taken one another's gauge, the two warriors settled down to answering and interpreting the commandant's questions. Finding that the Shawnee could tell him but little of the affairs on the Pennsylvania frontier, the officer soon dismissed him.

Buckner lounged round the Indian camp to secure the information for which he had come in search. The French of Kaskaskia now espoused the cause of the British merely from necessity. There was never any great number of Indian allies there at any time. Of vigilance there was none.

The officers believed that the frontier was on the point of surrender. They based this largely on the absolute lack of discipline among the militia, and the fact that the men obeyed their officers or defied them as they chose. They read in this a general dissatisfaction with the colonial cause and a leaning toward the British. The rank and file of British and other European armies were composed of men who, even in civil life, had known nothing save subservience to others. Therefore, to the martinet officers of the regular army, disobedience on the part of soldiers could mean nothing but uniting against the cause for which they fought. Buckner knew that all this was a mere surface manifestation on the part of men who would fight to the last for the colonial cause but who were so fiercely independent that their officers

could only lead them, never command them. The officers at Kaskaskia similarly believed that war was imminent between Pennsylvania and Virginia over disputed boundary lines. Buckner knew that these dissentions were more clamorous than deadly. He heard with grave concern, however, that Daniel Boone had been captured by savages in Kentucky and taken north into the wilderness of the Ohio.

It was evident that the British at Kaskaskia, believing as they did, had not the faintest suspicion that the settlers of the frontier could plan or execute a move so bold as to dispatch a hostile force against these remote wilderness posts. The seeming impossibility of Clark's scheme was the very factor that rendered it brilliantly possible of achievement.

Having secured such information as he desired, Buckner planned to leave at dawn of the third day. Every hour of his stay was fraught with peril. The name of Buckner was well known to every allied tribe as a dangerous enemy who had once been a captive among the Shawnees. Parties of savages arrived and departed almost hourly. Some among them might recognize him as the former Shawnee. Among the French of Kaskaskia, no doubt, were many who had traded in the Shawnee town during his sojourn there or during one of his subsequent visits and who might recognize and denounce him.

His plans for departure were upset, however. On the evening of the second day a party of ferocious Potawatami and Chippewa warriors arrived in camp, followed by the arrival of a few haughty Sioux

braves from the upper Mississippi. The commanding officer promised the Indians three kegs of rum upon the following night and they insisted that the visiting Shawnee remain and drink with them. It was an invitation which no savage would decline and Buckner felt obliged to accept it.

The next day was spent in loafing, feasting, gambling and conversation. Several of the Potawatamis spoke either Shawnee or Wyandotte and all were interested in the campaign of the allied tribes against the settlers of Kentucky.

"It is well that the Shawnees have gone south again to fight the Long-knives of Kentucky," one said to Buckner. "We hear that even in the face of war they keep coming, a lodge at a time, across the passes of the Cumberlands; and that others build their lodges on rafts, with their horses, tame buffaloes and squealing pigs, and float down the Ohio to make a landing in Kentucky."

"It is true," Buckner affirmed. "The waters of the upper Ohio show white in the moonlight from the bones on its bed; also the passes of the Cumberlands are white with the bones of those who have fallen before the tomahawks of my brothers. But still they come."

"That is bad," said another brave. "Sometimes the grasshoppers swarm across the country and eat the grass from the ground, but the grass grows again another year. So do the red men wander, using the earth as a whole and taking from it what they choose. What they take, Manitou replenishes, so that those

who come after them find all as it was before and ready for their use. But the grubs of the tree borer, each devouring a small section of a living trunk, destroy mighty trees so that the leaves do not come again. And in that fashion the Long-knives, each declaring a small piece of ground for his own, which no other can use, will soon honeycomb all the lands so that the peoples of Manitou will cease to exist."

"It is true," Buckner assented.

"Then why is not the scalp of every Long-knife in Kentucky curing in the smoke of Shawnee campfires instead of being worn by these white devils in the ancient hunting ground of the red men?" a warrior inquired fiercely.

"The hunting parties of the Potawatamis take the skins of many panthers, yet there are still many panthers wearing their pelts in your country," Buckner said. "So do the war parties of the Shawnees find things in Kentucky."

"Ugh!" a warrior grunted assent. "I can see it."

"It is well known that the peoples of Manitou are the best warriors of any race," said another. "When we fight, instead of listening to the false promises of the white men, we always win. It was so against the French. Later, fighting with the French against the Redcoats, four hundred warriors cut Braddock's army of fifteen hundred men to shreds. Scalps fell as the leaves of the maples turn red and flutter to earth with the first frosts of autumn, and the survivors fled as leaves are scattered before the winter wind. The Indian loss was less than ten. At Fort Du-

quesne, we destroyed Grant's whole army of Scotch Highlanders. They stood playing their music, huddled together like pigeons on the roost, so that our bullets could not miss, until we killed or captured them almost to the last man with a loss of but four braves. Under the great Pontiac, we carried nine Redcoat forts and scores of small settlements. We cut Cuyler's force to pieces without the loss of a single warrior and put sixty-five of his men to the fire at one time in Pontiac's camp. We threw Dalzell's force back in a bloody rout at Detroit. All of these things I remember well, and I am yet a young man. I have not matched tomahawks with the Long-knives of Kentucky. Tell me, then, what manner of men are these few Kentuckians who have increased by thrice in the face of war?"

"These Kentucky men of Boone's are not ordinary soldiers and settlers such as the peoples of Manitou have found it easy to defeat," Buckner said. "They are wild men of the woods. When they attack, it is swift as the swoop of a hawk and unexpected as lightning from unclouded skies. When they are attacked, they take cover like quail. When they retreat they leave no more trail than a bird in the sky or a fish in the waters of the Ohio. They sleep with eyes and ears open and cannot be surprised. They can shoot the eye from a squirrel or the head off a turkey."

"The Shawnee speaks the truth," said another Potawatami. "I have heard those things before from the lips of those who have fought them."

The drinking began at sundown. The British officers, well aware of the frenzied nature of a drinking spree among the savages, kept their men confined to the fort. A drunken killing between an Indian and a soldier during the course of the spree might easily result in the loss of all the Western tribes as allies or even in open hostilities. An Indian, even when sober, always resorted to knife or tomahawk with deadliest intent in any altercation. It was certain that there would be at least a few casualties during the night. The French of Kaskaskia, however, particularly those who had traded in the Indian towns, were by no means so retiring, and a dozen or more resorted to the Indian camp and imbibed their share of the raw spirits. The drinking became frenzied. Many braves, quickly overcome, staggered away and fell prone to the ground. Squaws and even little children screeched in drunken frenzy. Buckner watched his opportunity to depart unobserved and could have done so save for the fact that various of the Potawatamis persisted in engaging him in long conversation. The night was extremely black, but a great fire cast a circle of radiant light over the savage scene.

Three Potawatamis induced one of their number to recite to Buckner the details of a great fight in which he had engaged in his youth. In the full glare of the fire, they accosted him, and the warrior began the recitation with drunken gravity. Savage etiquette decreed that his listeners remain until he had finished. At that inopportune moment the French greeted a

group of new arrivals, several British and French colonials who had been fighting with the Shawnees against the Kentuckians. They brought several scalps and the Indians surged round to view the trophies.

Buckner and his companions could not leave until the brave had finished his recitation. A cold shock flooded Buckner from heel to crown as some one pronounced his name from a few feet behind him. For one tense second he believed that he had been recognized and denounced. And the voice was Benoit's. Then Buckner realized that the men behind were merely discussing him without the slightest suspicion that he was within hundreds of miles of Kaskaskia.

"Buckner came near to spoiling it by warning Donner," Benoit said, and proceeded to relate how he had led the detachment into an ambush to be slaughtered. "I've a score to settle with Buckner. It was his ball, I hear, that creased my chest at Donaldson's farm and came near to finishing me. And once, as a mere squirt of a brat in the Shawnee towns, he almost had me killed over nothing. Captain Kemper here, too, has a score to pay off."

Buckner heard Kemper's voice relating his capture and subsequent ill-treatment at the hands of Buckner and his men. He made the details lurid enough. Then he related the imaginary slaying of his guards and his daring escape, calmly receiving congratulations upon his amazing exploit.

So Kemper had violated his parole, thus losing caste in the eyes of all men of his class who might hear of it. Feigning interest in the words of the

Potawatami brave, Buckner kept his back to the group. One glimpse of his face by Kemper or Benoit and his fate was sealed. The warrior finished and Buckner voiced his approval.

"Come," said one of his companions. "We will view the scalps of these Long-knives."

"I will join you soon," Buckner said.

He staggered toward the edge of the firelit space as if nearly overcome by the liquor and had almost attained to the welcome blackness outside it when a voice called out to him. Some one had reported the presence in camp of a Shawnee and the new arrivals wished to speak to him.

"Shawnee!" the voice called out, followed by a laugh, as the men recognized his condition. He pretended not to hear and staggered on. Save for one circumstance, he would have attained the outer blackness without much attention being paid him.

Kemper had detached himself from the group and started toward the fort to report. Hearing the voices calling to the Shawnee, he turned and looked back, then stepped into the dim half-light at the extreme outer edge of the firelit space and accosted Buckner face to face.

"Much high wine, Shawnee," he chuckled.

Buckner gave guttural assent.

"High wine!" he repeated, voicing the words that every savage knew from the traders as the name of the alcohol, diluted with water, that served as trade rum. "Plenty high wine!"

He ought to lurch on past, but even in the dim half-

light, Buckner saw recognition dawn upon the face of Kemper. Instantly, the point of his scalping knife was pressed against the pit of the man's stomach. Buckner's back concealed the move from the throng near the fire.

"Back up!" he hissed. "A word out of you, dog, and you die in your tracks!"

Taken by surprise, Kemper complied and two backward steps carried them into the outer darkness. Seizing him by the shoulder, Buckner whirled him around and placed the point of his knife against his spine.

"Step straight ahead, and carefully!" Buckner ordered.

Kemper knew that once they were beyond earshot, Buckner would kill him with no more compunction than he would feel in crushing the head of a snake. As his presence of mind reasserted itself, he chose chance to certainty. Before they had penetrated more than twenty steps into the outer blackness, he gave a mighty spring forward and lifted his voice in a ringing cry for help. Fearing each second that he would feel the knife in his back, Kemper leaped straight ahead in the direction in which they had been traveling. Buckner, having anticipated just that move, flashed off at right angles and circled completely round the fire. When the savage throng had rushed out towards Kemper, Buckner had attained the point where the Indian canoes were beached on the bank of the river. Silently as possible, he launched one, thrusting it far out into the current,

then paddled swiftly for the far side of the stream and landed, shoving the canoe into the current behind him. They would be more apt to look for him downstream so he set off at an easy lope in the Indian trail that led upstream along the river. For two hours he held that pace, then struck off due north. Throughout the night, he held a northward course. On four different occasions he entered shallow streams and waded either up or down their beds for a considerable distance in search of some spot on either side where he might emerge without leaving a trail. The moon rose white and still, a material aid to him. In leaving woodland to cross stretches of prairie he chose points where herds of buffalo had trampled the grass in crossing.

Toward morning, using every precaution to break his trail, he turned from his course and traveled for some five miles. Swift dawn caught him out in a wide expanse of prairie and he dared not move on across it. Fortunately, the grass had been thoroughly trampled by buffaloes and other game. Making another swift turn for half a mile, he selected a spot and sprawled flat in the ten-inch grass. Face down, he slept until high noon. The sun scorched him and the flies bit viciously. But the stoical patience that he had learned among the Shawnees stood him in good stead now. He had covered over thirty miles since leaving Kaskaskia. The savages would work out his trail eventually, but it would take time. After determining his general direction, they had sent out swift runners to station themselves in the tops of

lofty trees that grew on ridges or at other points that commanded a wide view. Of that, he was quite certain. Better to remain here and take the chance that those who clung to his trail would fail to unravel it to this point before night came again.

He wove strands of grass into his scalp lock, some standing stiffly erect, others straying down across his skull and face. Then, very gradually, he elevated his head until his eyes were flush with the grass tops round him. Hourly, he surveyed the surrounding prairies. Meanwhile he speculated upon Kemper's having broken his parole. His charges of mistreatment at the hands of Buckner had been for the purpose of discrediting anything the latter might say to the contrary—the word of a British officer against that of a band of half-wild border woodsmen. One could expect nothing from a beast like Benoit, but Kemper—

"A skunk is an ill-smelling varmint, as ordained by nature," Buckner murmured, "so we are able to guard against too close contact with him. Therefore, he's less objectionable than the blooded dog who rolls in foul carrion and returns to lie under the table."

Thus did he summarize, as an Indian might have done, the fact that Kemper, having fallen from a higher level than that of Benoit, had dropped to a far lower one in Buckner's estimation.

Not until two hours before sundown did his frequent surveys reveal anything of sinister significance. Then a line of dark specks caught his eye. A

score of figures, strung out on a mile-long front, were advancing toward him across the prairie. It was evident that they had lost his trail and were following the general direction it had pointed. Fortunate that he had made that last half-mile bend at right angles. The nearest member of the line passed some two hundred yards from him. At last he cautiously raised his head and peered after them. They were almost a mile beyond him and the sun was swinging low over the horizon. A dim line of forest showed faintly a couple of miles beyond the warriors. There were two white men among them, Kemper and Benoit, no doubt. The danger seemed over for the present.

Then suddenly a new menace appeared. High overhead a crow gave forth its muster call and wheeled to peer down at that still dark form in the grass. Two others joined it, circling lower. From time immemorial, crows had been accustomed to follow parties of warriors. If such parties were hunting, there would be scraps of meat; if bent upon war, then there would be whole bodies upon which to feast, and the crow was too intelligent a bird to overlook such indications of easy meat.

Buckner, while peering anxiously after the retreating line of warriors, moved his arm sidewise to inform the questing crows that he was alive. After discussing this in the crow language, the black pirates slanted down to alight on the prairies. They had known of wounded men dying. Others joined them. Occasionally one rose and flapped his way above the prostrate form, voicing his opinion to his

fellows. But the line of warriors held on, apparently unaware of the crow conclave a mile in their rear.

They were swallowed up in the distance. The remaining period of light seemed long in terminating, but not until it was quite dark did Buckner rise. Then it was to turn directly back upon his course, heading for the last timber through which he had crossed just prior to dawn. It was not quite two miles away. He approached it cautiously by way of a grassy draw. The savages, no doubt, had left scouts there. When just within the edge of the timber, he suddenly flattened against a tree trunk as the tread of moccasined feet reached his ears, then low voices.

The party halted within a few feet of him.

"What makes you feel sure we passed him on the prairie?" Kemper's voice inquired.

"The crows," Benoit replied. "They'd have paid no heed to sleeping game, yet they left off following us and congregated there, but without crowding in to feed as they would have at a carcass. It was something they thought to be wounded and about to die. Lie down on the prairie yourself some time after a war party has passed and see it with your own eyes. I made no doubt it was him."

"Then why didn't we turn back and catch him while it was light?" Kemper asked.

"He was watching them and us too, never fear," Benoit said. "The second we'd turned back on our course, he'd have been up and away, with a mile start on us and him fresh from resting all day while we were working out his trail. He'd have outrun us

until nightfall and give us the slip. He must suspect that we noticed those crows and will be laying for him ahead. So perhaps he'll turn back. If he does hold on, those we left there will pick him up. If he turns back, we may bag him, with a warrior stationed every two hundred yards along the forest."

The party moved on, leaving a savage stationed within ten feet of Buckner. The tread of feet died out in the distance. Benoit and the savages had not failed to observe the crows; also they had given Buckner credit for knowing they must have observed them. A hard one to outfigure—Benoit was. For half an hour there was not a sound. The warrior might have been a shadow. To make one spring and overwhelm him with a surprise attack might be accomplished; but to do it so swiftly that he would be unable to let out a warning screech that would bring the others down upon the spot would be infinitely more difficult. A fresh evening breeze sprang up to rustle the grass and whip the leaves of the trees. Buckner sighed with relief. With his thumb, he shot a bullet so that it landed with a thud beyond and to the right of the savage. The shadow shifted silently and the waiting man knew that the warrior had turned and was peering intently in the direction of the sound. Under cover of the next stiff gust of wind, Buckner made his spring. The savage went down without a sound as the heavy tomahawk crushed his skull.

Buckner removed his scalp, appropriated his

musket and slipped back through the forest. With a full night before him he covered such a distance and broke his trail so effectively that when he laid by for the day he was unmolested and headed on again with the first shades of night. Later, he veered to the east, ferrying himself over the rivers on drift logs. One morning as he was preparing to retire for the day on a wooded ridge, he looked forth across vast Illinois prairies. On and on they stretched to the far horizon, a rolling green sea, dotted here and there with dark islands of trees. Herds of buffaloes grazed upon the lush prairie grasses. Deer and turkeys were everywhere in evidence near timberd stretches. A black she-bear and her cubs dug for roots two hundred yards out in the open—the land of the hunter's most colorful dreams, a region of unbelievable fertility.

And suddenly it was given to Rod Buckner to lift for a moment the veil of the future. The actual meaning of that growing, desperate hatred between the red men and the white was clear to him. It was in the basic difference in which they viewed the land and the uses to which it should be put. So long as that difference existed, there would be war, and the differences would exist until one race or the other was conquered. The two could not possess the land together. One would conquer, the other would vanish from the land. Men came to the frontier to hurl their lives away in seemingly senseless wars against the savages. But whether they knew it or not, the great underlying motive was the same—the irresistible

urge to possess a piece of the earth and call it home. Why did men sell themselves into bondage for a period of years in return for their passage to this new country? So that when their tenure of labor was ended they might stand where they had but to tomahawk the trees and say, "This land is mine." Then they would be free men and landowners, never again to be near serfs and mere land workers. Once Buckner had witnessed a vast migration of squirrels through the wilderness, countless thousands of them traveling in the same direction, over the land and through the trees and swimming across rivers. Their natural enemies had slain them in great numbers and the elements had taken further toll, but the oncoming thousands had thrown their lives away carelessly, the whole squirrel nation seemingly actuated by a blind, unreasoning impulse to attain some land of promise. Standing there and gazing out across the prairies, he now compared that squirrel migration to the westward surge of the land-hungry. Thousands would throw away their lives in vain but others would take their places in that insatiable land mania, the desire to take root in the soil. And so long as there was land for the taking, the land-hungry would come in an irresistible tide to take it. And here was land, oceans of it, unbelievably fertile. He visioned that wave of settlement creeping even here, at present beyond the ambition, beyond the knowledge even, of the most land-hungry of them all. But they would come and tomahawk their rights upon the trees and drive their claim stakes in the prairie

sod. In that moment it was given him to see the Indians as a vanishing people.

Never again was he to vision it quite so clearly as on that occasion when he stood there in the early morning light and gazed out across the Illinois prairies. But ever after he was to read into territorial boundary disputes, factional quarrels, violated treaties and Indian campaigns, under whatever guise they might be launched, the true motivating force beneath it—the irresistible magnet of free land.

CHAPTER VII

Buckner hurled his tomahawk absently at a two-inch sapling twenty-five feet away and walked from the fire to retrieve it.

"Not much use for that, whar you're heading," Gilpin observed.

That was true enough, Buckner reflected. It was all over now. That is, one might say it had ended. England had capitulated to the colonies even if the formal details had not yet been arranged. No, he would not need that tomahawk at Great Oaks. Nevertheless, he would feel lost without it.

"Some day," Gilpin predicted, "you'll be thinking about this or that, absent-minded like, and will haul out a tomahawk and start hurling it at a mark in a roomful of settlement folks and stampede the lot of them."

Such a thing might occur, Buckner conceded. Certain it was that when preoccupied he resorted unconsciously to the habit of throwing the tomahawk. Redskins practiced the art interminably and he had acquired it himself.

"When do you go to fetch White Fawn?" Gilpin inquired.

"Soon as things quiet down a bit," Buckner said.

His last secret visit to White Fawn had been two

years before. She had been fourteen then—would be sixteen now. She had agreed to return with him to the whites when he came again. But war conditions had rendered a trip to the Shawnee town impractical.

"Whar at does she hail from?" Gilpin asked.

"Crenshaw Bottom," Buckner informed.

"Ain't been a musket shot or a war whoop heered in Crenshaw Bottom for upwards of twenty year," Arch Herne declared. "How come she was captured from thar?"

"It wasn't at Crenshaw. Her people were making a journey when the savages jumped them up," Buckner explained.

"She got any kinfolks living?" Gilpin queried.

"I don't know. It doesn't matter much. I'll take her to Great Oaks if there are no relatives," Buckner said.

Donner, now a major, passed the fire where the four rangers sat.

"Yonder goes our old friend," Tom Herne chuckled. "Donner hails from Crenshaw Bottom. Maybe he can tell you somewhat of White Fawn's kin."

Buckner shrugged, according the major a bare word as he passed. Since that night four years before, when he had warned Donner against crossing the Ohio there had been no affection wasted between the militia officer and the ranger chief. At various times their wills had clashed. Donner had ordered Buckner to accompany the former's command with

his rangers on two different occasions and Buckner had declined. Donner, two years before, had preferred charges against Buckner for disobedience of military orders. The charges had been dropped without even an investigation and Donner asserted that the reason for such dismissal of charges rose from the fact that Buckner was a Virginian while he was a Pennsylvanian.

"If disobeying military orders is cause for trial," Gilpin said, recalling the incident, "then the hull male population of the frontier is liable. Ain't scassly a man but what has told some officer or other what was on his mind and made off for home because he didn't like the way things was going. Out here, every human feels qualified to tell his commanding officer how things ort to be run. If he's denied that privilege he'll quit that outfit cold and jine out with some other."

Donner was now in command of a militia outfit encamped near where the four rangers were bivouacked.

The struggle on the frontier had been long and desperate, and the male population was still largely under arms. The escape of both Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton from the savages and their return to lead the Kentuckians had been of inestimable benefit. Hardy Virginia and Carolina woodsmen had poured across the passes of the Cumberlands to join the few settlers of Kentucky. Its population had more than trebled in the face of war. And during the past year, during which the savages evidently

had decided to leave Kentucky largely unmolested, hundreds of families other than those of woodsmen had migrated there.

The frontiers of Western Pennsylvania and Virginia, however, had not fared so well. The settlers had suffered terribly from continuous savage depredations. Kemper and Benoit, particularly, had been persistent in leading successful Indian forays against the settlements. Their names were cordially detested the entire length of the frontier. Scarcely a border family that had not lost members, or at least relatives, during the past years of border war. A most venomous and enduring hatred existed between the settlers and the savages. Members of each race hunted those of the other more relentlessly and with greater determination than was manifested by the hunters of either race in pursuit of four-footed quarry. The frontier had developed a breed of men peculiar to the conditions which they must confront—the woodsmen of the border fringe. Numbering less than a thousand all told, they were true creatures of the wilderness, wild as wolves, ferocious as grizzlies, cunning as panthers, recognizing no laws save the code of their own clan. Ninety per cent. of them at one time or another had been captured by savages and adopted into some tribe. Even the civilization of the outermost fringe of settlements was irksome to them. To reside in a cabin was less preferable than to bivouac wherever night overtook them in the wilderness.

Buckner, facing the contingency of returning to

Great Oaks, knew that no matter where duty led him, in spirit he was irrevocably one of this brotherhood of the border fringe. He was recalled from this train of speculation by Gilpin.

"What was White Fawn's name in the settlements?"

"Patricia Lander," Buckner said. He seldom thought of her save as White Fawn. Most of the white captives who had become thoroughly naturalized as Indians scarcely recalled their original names after all the years among the savages. Buckner turned suddenly to the two Herne brothers. Odd that he had never thought of any possible connection before. But he had never thought of the Shawnee, Gray Wolf, by any other than his Indian name—had forgotten, in fact, that he had once heard his real one. But it had leaped up out of the past in connection with recalling White Fawn's civilized name.

"Did you ever have a brother named William Herne?" he asked.

The two Hernes turned to him with sudden interest.

"I reckon we did," Tom said. "He was took by the Injuns same time as Arch and me. Also another brother, Applegate Herne, which we all styled him App, that a way for short. We was separated and I was adopted into the Wyandottes while Arch went to the Lake Delawares. It warn't till five year after, when we was exchanged by treaty, that Arch and me ever set eyes on each other again. We never did get word of William or App."

"William is a Shawnee warrior, Gray Wolf," Buckner said. "I know him well."

"Sho!" Tom Herne exclaimed. "William must be right at thirty now, or close to it. And he's been a Shawnee brave all these years! Arch and me figured to make a visit to our Wyandotte and Lake Delaware families when peace times come. After that we'll saunter down and look up William."

"Yeah—we'll do that," Arch Herne agreed. "Likely with you, when you go to fetch White Fawn, Buckner. How long you figure to stay back in the settlements?"

"He won't stay thar long," Gilpin prophesied. "The wilderness claims her own. Her voice can't be gainsaid. When the ice goes out and the wild geese clank north, his fancy will take wing and fly with them and his spirit will chafe because his body can't follow his fancy. When the sap runs up the trees in the spring time, his blood will pulse in tune with it; and a roof over his head will fret him when he wants only the budding leaves and the blue sky for his canopy. Hot summer winds will whisper to him of cool wilderness rivers that the rest of us are swimming across with our rifles and powder horns held high out of the wet; and he will dislike the house of four walls that cages him. When a cold tang comes in the fall and the bucks are horning the brush to rub off the velvet and polish their points for the rutting moon, a soft bed will smother him; and he'll want to scratch up a heap of fresh leaves and bed down on the ground. The wilderness will sing to

him and he'll heed the call and come back to it."

But Buckner, while aware that the wilderness would always sing her seductive song to him, was not so sure that he would heed it. His uncle had married during the war and his young wife, the former Becky Harper, had presented him with an infant son. The Buckner fortunes had faded in the face of war. The elder man had sent urgent messages stating that his nephew's presence was needed to help him recoup his fallen fortunes. It was not clear to Buckner just how he could help in restoring that vanished wealth, but if his uncle needed him it was a duty that he had no desire to shirk. He faced the resumption of life at Great Oaks with misgivings and the opposite of elation, but there was no other course.

He bade Gilpin and the two Hernes good-bye and started out upon his long ride to the East. He found the spacious halls of Great Oaks swarming with important personages discussing the details of the coming peace, the problems of self-government for the new United States and kindred matters. These men conferred until far into the night, then resumed early the following day. Parties arrived and departed daily. Men made exhaustive inquiries as to the feasibility of various colonization projects in the wilderness of the West.

Becky Harper Buckner, his uncle's young wife, made much of him. Her younger sister, Lucia Harper, was openly captivated by him. The ladies of the visiting gentlemen were consciously flirtatious as

their eyes followed his erect figure, carried with the loose-hipped gait of the savages and the border woodsmen.

His flowing muscles seemed too closely confined in the knee breeches, tight hose, gay waistcoats, fine linen and cravats of the period. His head, upon which the hair had been permitted to grow for the past month, was encased in a wig which he found uncomfortably hot. With it all, he was mildly surprised to discover that he had become widely famed. In a day when the dashing soldier was the popular hero and savior of the nation, Buckner's name had become almost legendary as synonymous with desperate valor in the wild regions of the West. A host of tales were associated in the popular mind with the exploits of Buckner's Rangers; of beleaguered settlers' families, facing what seemed certain death at the hands of assailing savages, delivered at the eleventh hour by the sudden swoop of that hardy crew; of terrified prisoners taken so deep into the Indian country by victorious war parties that all hope had been abandoned, only to find themselves rescued by a desperate night attack upon their savage captors by this little band of border hawks. In addition to dozens of such tales that had accumulated during the years, it was known that Buckner had marched with that immortal little command of General George Rogers Clark to capture the wilderness posts of Cahohia, Kaskaskia and Vincennes, resulting even in the capture of Hamilton himself. Clark's exploit had fired the imagination of the

world, and has few parallels in the annals of warfare. His hardy woodsmen, first descending the Ohio by boat, had pressed on in the face of overwhelming odds, encountering incredible hardship, reduced almost to starvation, at one time having been forced to wade and swim for more than five miles over flooded ground to deliver their attack. But they had conquered, not only taking the forts but gaining the allegiance of the French colonials and causing the Indians of the whole Illinois region to make a treaty of neutrality.

In the popular mind, the iron woodsmen of the frontier had become traditional symbols of invincible prowess—men to whom the seemingly impossible was but a challenge to be accepted casually. In the more westerly settlements, even those too far east to fall within the actual sphere of savage warfare, many youths had adopted the attire of the woodsmen and swaggered about in leggings and breechclouts, picturing themselves as young editions of those wild hawks of the border.

Buckner found the East full of spirited young men who had laid down sword and musket to resume pen and plow in the city and on the farm at the cessation of hostilities, many of whom found the change irksome after years of martial enterprise. The most adventurous among them, fired by tales of rich lands in the West and of the adventure that awaited them there, announced their intention of heading for the wilderness as soon as the last details of the peace had been concluded. Many, assuming that the negotia-

tions would go through and that their services would no longer be required in the East, had already started.

There came a day when the elder Buckner, pacing the halls of Great Oaks, confided to his nephew that he was a ruined man. The greater number of his slaves and live stock had been sold and the lands pledged to New England money lenders as security for borrowed funds. The new and harassed government could make return to him only in the depreciated and almost worthless colonial currency or by way of land warrants. He had chosen the latter.

For the first time, Buckner learned what part he was to play in retrieving his uncle's fallen fortunes. The elder man saw but one course open—to take his remaining slaves and live stock, trek westward and take up lands available under his warrants, thus setting up a new estate in the West. Rod's part was merely to select the best available lands and to aid in the removal of effects and the establishment of the new colony.

His spirit soared with the knowledge. That was a part that he could play with the best of them, while here in the thickly settled regions he had felt at a loss as to how to carry on effectively. Now the heaviness that had weighed upon his spirit was suddenly dissipated.

When the project became known, the applicants who wished to throw in with such an expedition assumed the proportions of a small army. Buckner declined all such offers for the present and started out

at once. He found Gilpin and the two Hernes on the Ohio and asked them to accompany him to the Shawnee country.

"We can make it, few savages as there are prowling this time of year," he predicted. "I will signal White Fawn to me and she can bring Gray Wolf, your brother, to us at some safe point."

It was late in February and the weather was extremely cold though there was little snow on the ground. After crossing the Ohio, the four woodsmen traveled to the towns of the Moravian Delawares on the Muskingum. The towns stood empty and deserted, the doors of the churches swinging open to the weather, last year's crops standing unpicked in the fields. The unfortunate Moravian Delawares, despite their exile to the Muskingum, had steadfastly declined to join in the war. The British at Detroit, decreeing that if they refused to take up arms against the colonists they must be removed to some distant point, had escorted the entire populations of the three towns deep into the wilderness and left them there to shift for themselves as they might.

Gilpin surveyed the scene of desertion and shook his head.

"The Injun nation that lays down the tomahawk in favor of the hymn book is making a bad trade," he said. "Here's these eastern Delawares, once the mightiest redskin nation of the lot, and now, without lifting a finger in war for more than a generation, they've declined to a pitiful few. The Lake Delawares, never so powerful, has relied on the tomahawk and

the warlike teachings of Manitou and are as strong as they ever was. Speaking as a white man, I've less than no complaint, but I'm gazing on it from the red skin's p'int of view. The fact remains that the wild Injun who waves a tomahawk under the white man's nose and calls him a dog to his face has always been able to get closter to a squar' deal than the tame Injun who waves his pray'r book and calls the white man brother."

They stayed the night in one of the untenanted lodges. As they started on in the morning they met a large force of returning Delawares, composed mostly of old men, squaws, and children. They hailed the four woodsmen joyfully as old friends. The British, they said, had permitted a few of them to return and pick such of last year's corn as might remain in the fields and thus relieve the famine among their tribe.

The four frontiersmen avoided the main Indian trails and traveled largely at night with the bare leafless branches of the forest trees forming a tracery above them against the winter sky. Buckner left them concealed in a patch of down timber more than a mile from the small Shawnee town that had once been his home. He pressed on alone to within two hundred yards of it and lifted his voice in the quavering falsetto of a screech owl, then the harsh squawk of a night heron and the silvery cry of the plover, thrice repeated.

He then waited tensely. It was unfortunate that he had not agreed with White Fawn upon a set of winter signals. It was possible, though unlikely, that a few

stray plovers had returned from the winter migration, but it was doubtful if there were any night herons so far north at this time of year, particularly in view of the extreme cold. And savages were quick to detect such departures from the natural. After an interminable wait, fearing to give the signal again, he heard the sleepy twitter of a sparrow from close at hand and answered it. A form glided noiselessly to him in the gloom.

A strange wine of elation coursed through his veins at the contact as the girl leaned against him. It came to him that White Fawn was taller and heavier than on the occasion of his last visit. That was natural, of course, as she was a growing girl, while he had been thinking of her as the slender slip of a thing that he had seen two years before.

"White Fawn thought that you would never come," she said. "The time has seemed long while she waited."

"I may have come too soon even now," he said. "Peace is not yet assured between the Long-knives and the red peoples of the Ohio. It may be that the Shawnees will not let White Fawn go with me to the lodges of the Long-knives and that you must slip away without their knowledge."

"White Fawn goes with Talk-with-birds whenever he wills it," the girl said simply.

Again he was conscious of that strange ecstasy that flooded him as her soft form was pressed against him.

"Three friends lie hidden not far away," he said. "All have lived among the red men. Two of them are

blood brothers of Gray Wolf. They would see him. Think you the Shawnees would permit us to enter the town as friends, or is war too fresh in the past?"

He leaped back swiftly, taking the girl with him, as the least rustle of dead leaves reached his ears. His tomahawk had flashed into his hand even as he leaped.

"Strike not, my brother," a voice said from the night, and Standing Bear stepped from behind a tree a dozen feet from them. "I have heard your talk and it is good."

"The voice of the night heron and the plover brought you here!" Buckner divined.

"But naturally," Standing Bear agreed. "The voice of a bird does not carry for hundreds of miles, no matter how still the night."

"And there are no herons or plovers within that distance," Buckner amplified.

"So the notes must have come from the throat of a human mocking-bird," pursued Standing Bear. "If we were not at peace with the Cherokees of the South, in whose country the herons and plovers are wintering, our warriors would have been more alert and would have waked from their sleep at those notes, believing that the Cherokees were surrounding the town. Has my brother lost his cunning since he has lived among the Long-knives? Why not fire a gun as your signal, rather than rely on the notes of birds that are not here?"

"It is true," said Buckner. "Yet I had no other signal."

"It seemed certain that such must be the case," said Standing Bear. "I watched from my lodge to see who would answer so unnatural a call. When I saw White Fawn slip away into the forest, I knew that the notes were a voice out of the past and I followed."

"And my brother's toe is heavier than before," Buckner chided, "or it would not have kicked the leaves about so noisily."

"I came as a friend so there was no need for caution," Standing Bear excused himself. "But it is not possible for Talk-with-birds to bring his friends among the Shawnees. Even alone, you would not be safe. The Shawnees are not sure that peace has come between the Redcoats and the Long-knives. The Redcoats are not sure themselves. And even if it comes to pass, the red men may have to carry on the war. There are fresh blazes and strange markings on certain of the trees in Muskingum country. The Shawnees believe that, no matter what the treaty, settlers are planning to claim land there. Our grandfathers, the Delawares, are still for peace. Our uncles, the Six Nations, are for war to the end. The Shawnees incline to listen to the warlike counsel of our uncles, the Six Nations, since the peaceful ways of our grandfathers, the Delawares, have but served to deprive them of their lands and to bring upon them worse treatment at the hands of the Long-knives than that accorded any nation that still carries the tomahawk.

"Already the Kentuckians are too strong and the lands of Kentucky are lost to us. The marks on the

Muskingum resemble those that the Long-knives call Tomahawk Rights and by which they claim the land as their own. If the settlers come beyond the Ohio we must throw them back or fall back ourselves and depend upon the generosity of the far Western nations to share their lands with us, as we have shared ours with our grandfathers, the Delawares. Now our grandfathers have been pushed back still farther into the lands of the Wyandottes and it is feared that the Long-knives will attempt to settle the former lands of our grandfathers, the Delawares, on the Muskingum. The Shawnees are still in a dangerous mood."

"I feared it," Buckner said.

"And the Shawnees have not forgotten that Cornstalk, Red Hawk and other Shawnees were slain while on a mission of peace to the Long-knife. No Long-knife is safe among the Shawnees. We go now. We will bring Gray Wolf to your camp when midnight comes to-morrow, so that he may see his brothers. Then you must leave."

"It is done," Buckner agreed. "But White Fawn goes with Talk-with-birds when he leaves."

Again there was that delightful current pulsing through his veins as the girl pressed her soft form against him.

"That shall be as White Fawn decides," Standing Bear decreed. "Her father is dead in the wars and her mother followed him to Manitou last year. With you, White Fawn will have good treatment. With Kemper, the Redcoat, even though he is an ally, I

am not so sure, since it is known to me that he has a woman among the Delawares and another among the Cahohias of the West."

"Kemper!" Buckner exclaimed, "What has he to do with it?"

"The Redcoat desires White Fawn for himself," Standing Bear explained. "He is by no means the first. But Kemper, since he comes no longer to the Shawnee towns himself, being stationed in Detroit, sends Benoit in his stead. Each time he offers an increasing price—many guns, knives, tomahawks, blankets, much powder and lead and other things to Tonk-a-naw."

"And why to Tonk-a-naw?" Buckner demanded. He now understood that delightful wine that coursed through his veins at his contact with White Fawn's clinging form. She was no longer a child, but a budding young woman. He tried to reconstruct her in his thoughts but could visualize her only as the slender slip of a girl he had known; and his peering eyes could make out no details in the black shadows of the forest. It was only in the different quality of his awareness of her that he could credit the fact that she had budded to the point where she was desired by men. This Kemper, the man who had violated his parole as a gentleman, was not to have White Fawn. Of that, Buckner was suddenly positive. She should have the best in men, not the worst.

"Tonk-a-naw is the brother of her dead father and now the head of her lodge," Standing Bear explained. "He thinks some of accepting Kemper's next

offer when Benoit comes with it. It is Tonk-a-naw's right."

"A man who degrades his own honor is not one in whom to trust the honor of another," Buckner declared. "This Kemper is such a man. Honor he has none. White Fawn must not go to him. She comes with me."

"Yes," the girl said contentedly. "Where Talk-with-birds leads, White Fawn will follow. Always it has been written on my heart."

"It is well," Standing Bear agreed. "We go now. When midnight comes again, we will come to your camp with Gray Wolf. Then you must leave the Shawnee country."

CHAPTER VIII

"She should have come before now," Buckner said, breaking a long silence.

"The night is two hours old," Gilpin agreed. "And she should have arrived an hour past."

On the previous night Standing Bear, Gray Wolf, once William Herne, and White Fawn had come to the concealed camp of the four woodsmen and had conversed in low tones until near dawn. It had been arranged that White Fawn was to join them an hour after nightfall and accompany them to the frontier.

The sounds of the Indian town reached their ears, growing in volume.

"Hum!" Gilpin grunted. "Some commotion or other has riz up thar."

The sound rose to a persistent hum, then became a chant punctuated by the steady, monotonous tum, tum, tum, tum of the skin drums. The ears of each of the four men who sat there in the dark read a sinister significance into that throbbing voice of the tom-toms and the accompanying chant.

"It's war talk them drums are sounding," Tom Herne testified.

They sat again in silence and listened to the sounds.

"Well," Gilpin said presently. "Since Gray Wolf is brother to the Hernes and Standing Bear is foster

brother to Buckner, it would ill become any one of you to suggest what we all know must be done. Or at least, I take it that's why you are holding back your speech. But thar's a time when every warrior's bones must bleach in the wilderness and his hair be forfeit to the enemy. It's one of Nature's laws and is not to be gainsaid. If harm has come to them through us, then the least we can do as true men is to lay down our lives with theirs, and see to it that them lives come high. Which thar's none alive knows better how to do that last than the four men gathered here."

The other three grunted assent. The sudden commotion, coupled with White Fawn's failure to appear, permitted but one conclusion; that some suspicious Shawnee had followed their three friends and had accused them of secretly treating with the enemy. If that were true, the lives of Standing Bear, Gray Wolf and White Fawn would not be worth a straw. The Shawnees would kill them as a matter of justice. The four men rose as one and had taken their first step toward the Shawnee town when Buckner hissed a sharp warning.

"Hist! Some one comes!" he whispered.

"Running—and alone," Gilpin added under his breath. "A light tread. Likely 'tis the girl."

The faint tap, tap of moccasined feet drew nearer, coming directly toward their hiding place. It was evident that the runner came as a friend, else he would have traveled with more caution. The one who approached began to make his way across the many windfalls.

"Hold!" Buckner called softly when the lone traveler was within a few feet.

"Tecumseh—me friend," a voice answered in English. "Standing Bear he say you wait." A slender Shawnee lad of around twelve or thirteen years of age came to them. "Tecumseh, me. Spik Long-naff pooty goot, me," the boy said proudly. But he lapsed into the more familiar Shawnee tongue as he delivered his message to Buckner.

"Standing Bear feared that his friends would believe him to be in trouble when they heard the voices and the tom-toms and that they would throw their lives away coming to help him," Tecumseh explained.

"Which Standing Bear is a mighty understanding redskin," Gilpin said.

"Then what does all that commotion mean, Tecumseh?" Buckner asked.

"Him mean Injun man too much go to war pooty quick to-night," Tecumseh said. "Injun woman and chillun all get killed too much." Then he lapsed into the easier Shawnee tongue. "A war party of Long-knives crossed the Ohio to the deserted Delaware towns on the Muskingum. There they found the Christian Delawares, who had returned to pick last year's corn. The white men greeted them as friends, then locked them up, some ninety of them, in cabins and held council as to their fate. While the Delawares knelt in family groups and prayed to the white man's God, the Long-knives killed and scalped them all, even to sucking babes. Then their bodies were

piled in two cabins and burned. Some, though scalped, were not yet dead, and two escaped. Runners are taking the news to every town in the Ohio. Our uncles, the Six Nations, have wished to go on with the war. Now even our grandfathers, the Delawares, will take up the tomahawk. The nations rise."

"Hell will bust into flames before sun-up," Gilpin prophesied. "Within the week thar's many scalps, now resting safe on settlers' heads, that will be curing in the smoke of Injun campfires. The settlers has suffered enough to put hate in their hearts, with good reason, and twenty year of war has degraded the natural sympathies of mankind in the hearts of many to the p'int where taking of human life means no more than gunning for pigeons. We four have sent enough souls harping their way to'rds heaven so's 'twould be unbecoming to condemn the same practice in others. Still, the hair we've handled has been that of braves who was intent on taking ours. Such devil's business as the butchering of them helpless Delaware squaws and children I can't find it in me to condone."

Standing Bear, Gray Wolf and White Fawn joined them.

"Come. We go with you," said Standing Bear. "The nations rise as one. Your lives are not worth a puff of wind if you are seen. If we meet warriors, do not fight, which would only throw our lives away with yours. You give me the white man's parole, word of honor, till I tell you to go on alone?"

Wonderingly, they assured him that they did.

"Then if we are discovered, I will claim you as

captives and none can deny us the right to take you to our town to decide your fate in council. At least, we could then pretend to become angry and kill you painlessly on the way and save you from the ordeal of the stake."

"But see here," Gilpin remonstrated. "Throw us loose to fend for ourselves. Four foxes like us can squirm our own way through any ruckus that's likely to bust. And I make no doubt the girl White Fawn is equally apt."

"My way is best," Standing Bear decreed. "Tecumseh, do you lead the way by fifty paces. The cry of the screech owl at night and the bark of the squirrel by day for us to halt if there is danger ahead."

The youthful Tecumseh disappeared in the black forest and presently Standing Bear followed. Hour after hour the little procession moved swiftly through the night in single file. Standing Bear followed none of the regular Indian trails that led east, and he crossed those that traversed the forest from north to south with the greatest precaution. The moon came up. Half an hour later, Tecumseh, having crossed a well-beaten, north-and-south pathway, Standing Bear, after halting just before reaching it, nodded suddenly and leaped swiftly across it, followed by the others. They had covered no more than fifty yards beyond it when he halted and held up his hand. Each of the others glided silently into the shadow of some tree trunk. All heard the steady tread of many padded feet. The moonlight slanted down through the

leafless trees, shedding a ghostly radiance that lent a touch of unreality to the long line of wild figures that passed along the trail over which Buckner's party had just crossed. This savage procession glided along without speech, the moonlight glinting on musket barrels, war plumes and naked shoulders; a fascinating sight, yet one fraught with peril. Not until long after the padding footsteps had died out in the distance did the little party step from the shadows and resume its march. There might be stragglers from the war party, or flanking scouts.

A half hour later the soft cry of a screech owl sounded just ahead. Again the party halted, each one behind a tree. Again the thudding feet and a ghostly procession of painted warriors in the moonlight, heading into the south. Buckner counted them—something over fifty.

"So soon?" he whispered to Standing Bear, when they had passed. The Shawnee nodded.

"Other towns had the word before ours," he said "So they are on the move before us."

"To Kentucky," Buckner said, reading from this southern movement of the war parties the fact that Kentucky was to be their destination. As they stood there in the shadows of their respective trees, the four woodsmen were visualizing the same scene; the quiet farms of Kentucky, where for over a year the war whoop had not sounded; the older residents lulled into a sense of false security; those hundreds of new families that had migrated there during that last quiet year—people unschooled in war and the ways

of the frontier. Now they would wake to the dread sound of the war whoop and to their inevitable initiation into bloodshed and rapine.

When Standing Bear motioned them to proceed, he looked back over his shoulder. Gilpin had not followed. Gray Wolf, appearing suddenly from the rear, grunted an angry command, and the old woodsman rose from where he had been gliding on his face behind a down log that led off at right angles. Standing Bear returned from his place in the lead.

"You gave me your white man's parole; not one of you must leave until I give the word," he said sternly. "The first man that breaks his word will have the blood of his comrades on his soul. Brother as Talk-with-birds is to me, and brothers as these others are to Gray Wolf, we shall strike them dead and follow the trail of the one who leaves and take his scalp. I have spoken."

He resumed the lead and strode on through the moonlit forest, while Gray Wolf, once William Herne, brought up the rear a dozen yards behind the others. Buckner realized then, as did his three companions, Standing Bear's real reason for accompanying them. It had not been through fear that they would be unable to get through by themselves. He had known their ability all too well. But, as he would not break faith with them, neither would he break faith with his own people. He had known that the four rangers, heading east toward the settlements of Western Virginia, would discover and read correctly the march of war parties on every

trail that led to the south. They would change their course to the south and scatter so that some would be sure to get through, heading swiftly toward Kentucky. They would outstrip the war parties, swim the Ohio and warn the Kentuckians. This he had determined to prevent. He would conduct them safely to the east. Turn to the south they should not. This was his savage idea of honor satisfied on both scores. Their lives had been in his hand for two days. He believed them too honorable to take his life now. If they should, there were Tecumseh ahead and Gray Wolf behind, and their tongues would rouse the war parties to the south as they followed the woodsmen who had broken the faith. Those war parties would scatter out through the moonlit forest and it was doubtful if a single one of the four would live to reach the Ohio, much less swim it and land in Kentucky.

"Standing Bear, I'd plumb forgot that perole—not having give much thought to your parpose in asking it," Gilpin apologized. "I've obsarved before that you was an understanding redskin and a quick one. I now add that you're an honest man and a smart one—damned smart. I take it that we all travel east as before, and no rift in the party."

"Ugh," Standing Bear assented. After all, he had not underestimated these men, either as to intelligence or integrity, and his mind was freed of its former strain as he led the way to the east.

"After all," Arch Herne said presently. "A man don't go back on his word to save his own life or that

of others, once it's been passed among whites. And if he looks at it right, he should do no worse by the reds."

None inquired as to Buckner's viewpoint. He was a Buckner of Virginia, and in the code of his class, a man who violated a parole or broke his word to an enemy, much less a friend, forfeited his honor and became an outcast in the eyes of all right-thinking men. It was the code. The little party strode on throughout the night. In the first ghostly light of dawn they crouched in a thicket while twenty-odd ferocious Ojibwa braves strode southward along a near-by trail.

Only with the light of morning did Buckner become fully conscious of why men desired White Fawn. Most of those who had lived for any considerable period among the savages were not to be picked out among them by even the most searching scrutiny. Not so the girl upon whom his eyes now rested. Her tawny hair and pansy-blue eyes stamped her instantly as of white origin. Her skin was of such texture that the sun had darkened her face to only a creamy tan. And her swelling, firm young breasts and tapering hips were those of budding womanhood, not those of the slip of a girl he remembered. She was a lovely thing to look upon. And suddenly he knew a spasm of rage that a man without honor, a base hound like Kemper, should lift his eyes to her and aspire to her favors. Her blue eyes looked into Buckner's now with that same implicit confidence that had shown in them years ago when she had been

a tiny, frightened captive in the Shawnee town. But now her regard stirred something deep within him and occasioned a quickening of his pulse.

Her parting from the Shawnees and starting upon her journey to live among strange people had been made vastly easier by this intermediate stage in the company of the woodsmen and the three Shawnees. These Long-knives spoke many Indian languages and seemed to differ but little from the Indians. She felt quite at her ease with them.

The boy, Tecumseh, had persistently practiced speaking the English tongue, for some reason known only to himself. Since her promise to Buckner two years before to accompany him to the settlements on his next visit, White Fawn had endeavored to learn her native language with Tecumseh. Lacking formal instruction or any with whom to converse, their only recourse had been such words as Tecumseh had picked up from the British and the traders that came to the Shawnee country. But her tongue, from early experience with English words, now formed them much more readily than did Tecumseh's.

As they lay by for the day in a dense thicket, Buckner observed that the Shawnee youth, though looking upon them with no friendliness, nevertheless endeavored to bring his English into play whenever possible and seemed to have an insatiable desire to ask the English word that designated every tree, bird, object, utensil, weapon or article of attire.

"Where you learn speak Long-knife talk so good, Tecumseh?" Buckner inquired.

The boy made a gesture indicating that he picked it up wherever in the whole countryside it happened to be available.

"You learn speak Long-knife because you think mebbe you be all same white man some day?" Buckner asked. "No!" Tecumseh expelled with such vehemence as to draw all eyes to him. "Soon I will fight the Long-knives," the boy explained in Shawnee, "and it is well to know how one's enemy thinks in order to outwit him. Without knowing how he speaks, how can I know how he thinks?"

"Thar you uttered words that would do credit to mature men with wise heads on their shoulders," Gilpin said, bending upon the lad a closer scrutiny. "How come you like white men not too much—at your age?"

The boy shrugged as if that question needed no answer. But suddenly he changed his mind and rose.

"Tecumseh tell um," he offered.

He elected to illustrate his point by acting out his part instead of by exclusive use of words. He strode through an adjacent stretch of the thicket, then pointed to the area he had just traversed.

"Nothing change—all same. Injun man go here, go there, leave all same, come somebody else along," he said, then reverted to Shawnee the better to illustrate his meaning. "The red man goes through the land and uses the game, the trees, the birds and the fish as he needs them, but he leaves the land as Manitou fashioned it, and Manitou replenishes the things he uses. If another comes that way in one

moon or a thousand moons from now, he finds it good for his use as Manitou willed it. All save enemies are welcome to come and make use of it. It is all mine. I invite you to use it. Is that not like the red man's way?"

"It's the truth, Tecumseh," Buckner agreed.

"Me Long-naff now," said Tecumseh, passing over the same route as before. He blazed four saplings to mark out a square, then planted himself in belligerent attitude inside it.

"Long-naff walk this way—all change. Come somebody else along can't do." He scowled at them. "Tom'awk Rights! Tom'awk Rights! Belong me! You no come here!"

"Right you be, Tecumseh," Gilpin applauded. "The Injun leaves things as he finds them, free for the use of all. The white man up and claims it for the use of himself alone. Your meaning is clear as spring water and serves to illustrate the chief outstanding difference between the red man and the white in all matters of the land."

Already the Shawnee lad gave evidence of the clear-thinking intelligence that was to mark his after life and lead to heights attained by but few others in the history of his race. Already he saw, as Pontiac, the great Ottawa, had seen before him, that the red man's only possible hope to retain a bit of his lands was by war, never by promises and the ways of peace. The white man would never keep a treaty unless the red men with whom that treaty had been made were prepared to resist its violation with tomahawk and

musket. The whole history of the red peoples proved his point. The Delawares, mightiest nation of them all, had relied on peace and had lost their lands and perished. Those tribes who relied on war, while sometimes sorely pressed, at least survived and still retained a great portion of their lands. It was that intelligence, the power to gauge the future by the past and the unwavering determination to resist such encroachments, that was destined to carry him on until he became the greatest leader of the red nations since the days of Pontiac—and the last until the days of Sitting Bull. It was to lead him to a brigadier generalship in the British army. And it was to lead him to his death. For when, at last, Tecumseh was to see that all hope was gone and that he could not retain even a bit of the promised territory of Illinois for his people, after they had been pushed back and back, he was destined to lose all love of life. With the British retreating into Canada, he was to don his buckskins, instruct his friends as to the disposal of his effects and march back with his braves to face the advancing enemy, knowing that he would never see the sun rise again.

After the second night of travel, as they were now close to the frontier of Western Virginia, they held on at dawn instead of stopping. The Shawnees were to turn back within an hour. Tecumseh held his place in the lead. Suddenly he imitated the chattering bark of the red squirrel, the signal agreed upon for a daylight warning. They peered ahead and saw him esconced behind a mighty oak. He signalled that

there were white men concealed in the timber a musket shot ahead of him. The others moved up to him. Peering beyond Tecumseh, they could see some little movement a hundred and fifty yards ahead in the forest, a protruding head, an arm or two and the barrels of several muskets.

"As I live—an ambush!" Gilpin said. "They're l'arning, even though it wouldn't deceive the eyes of a redskin like Tecumseh. But despite the officers with European ideas of warfare, our milishy has l'arned to take cover, which makes them more than a match for any soldiers that march through the forest in close order and fire breast-high at nothing."

Buckner stepped from cover and lifted his hand in the peace signal but before he could raise his voice to announce his identity a score of men rose with wild cheer and charged headlong.

Gilpin and the two Hernes showed themselves with him, the right hand of each elevated.

"They think us British woodsmen with a few savages," Buckner said, and lifted his voice again. The foremost of the charging men faltered somewhat when within fifty yards and one of them caught Buckner's words and repeated them.

"Buckner's Rangers!" he shouted.

The men slowed to a trot and came up to them.

"Mistook you for savages," said one, looking past Buckner. The latter, noting the direction of his gaze, glanced over his shoulder to see Standing Bear and Gray Wolf standing a few yards in his rear. For the moment he had forgotten them.

"Go, my brothers," he said in Shawnee. "And may all be well with you till we meet again."

"They are savages, damn them, and Buckner himself is telling them to go free!" shouted a man who understood the Shawnee tongue. "They're Shawnees!"

There was a mutter of anger among the men and they surged forward. At that junction one of them saw Tecumseh standing unconcernedly beside the oak. With an oath, they made a rush for the lad as if to strike him down with the barrel of his musket. Fiercely, Buckner sprang into his path and thrust the man back so forcibly that he tripped and fell upon his back. Recovering himself, the fellow rose, cursing. Several others pressed forward.

"Stand back!" Buckner ordered in tones of ice. "Am I not well enough known so that you need not set upon those who are with me?"

He threw his piece forward and brought it to the cock. Gilpin and the two Hernes ranged themselves near by, their pieces at the ready, their tomahawks loosened and ready to hand.

"Those of you who are so bloodthirsty for scalps must earn the right to take mine before you touch those Shawnees," Buckner said. "Our lives have been in their hands for days, yet they have brought us through safe. Think you that I'll let you take theirs without first losing mine?"

The two Hernes murmured assent and Gilpin spat casually and remarked, "Yes it's that way with us. Have your say."

There was not a coward in the lot of those who faced them. Those with the least cowardly strain did not venture into Indian country as volunteers. They might lose lives from lack of experience in the strategy of savage warfare, but they would at least lose them bravely. It was not fear that kept them back, but the certain knowledge that before they could take the lives of the Shawnees they must sacrifice four men whose names were known the length of the frontier as a boon to all settlers and a scourge to marauding parties of savages.

"Well, whyn't you say that at fust?" one demanded surlily. "We all don't reckon to jump friends of yourn—yaller-hides or not."

There was a murmur of assent from the crowd. A smaller detachment that had not joined in the charge was now moving forward.

"Then turn back toward the Ohio," Buckner said. "Every second you stand here your hair is drawing a fraction farther away from your skull. Our lives are not worth a plugged shilling. Soon as we bid our Shawnee friends good-by we will join you and make tracks out of here."

"One of the Shawnees is a girl—and a blue-eyed girl at that! White, I'll stake my soul!" one of the men cried excitedly, as White Fawn ranged herself with the Shawnees in the rear.

The half-dozen men had joined the others and one strode forward importantly. Buckner found himself confronted by Major Donner.

"If you are not subject to obey a military com-

mand, Buckner, you certainly are not in a position to give one," he announced stiffly. "Yet I heard you order my men to return to the Ohio. I will give my own orders. Also, I will take charge of your prisoners."

"They are not prisoners. One is a captive white girl that we are bringing back. These Shawnees helped us through when our lives were in their hands. They are now free to go."

"That is your affair," Donner said harshly. "But I must ask you not to interfere with my affairs by talking to my men."

Buckner whirled and returned to the Shawnees. The lofty dignity of the savages forbade that there should be any trace of haste in their departure. Gray Wolf advanced haughtily toward the soldiers to bid his brothers farewell.

"God's name—it's the Herne boys' own blood brother that they just found among the Shawnees through Buckner!" said the man who understood the Shawnee tongue. "He's returning to the savages."

Gilpin, meanwhile, conversed with Major Donner, then came back to Buckner.

"Did you hear Donner's answer when I inquired what he was doing this side the Ohio with twenty-five men? Says he came over on a scout to find out what was afoot! How he's been saved from discovering what was afoot, with a war party on every trail to the south, will always remain one of the great unsolved mysteries. Here we've been trying our best

to dodge savages, at which game we're experts, and yet have run foul of the varmints by the hundred. And here these milishy has been blundering round in search of savages, with the hull forest a-swarm with them, and by the mercy of providence they didn't run foul of one. Well, miracles do happen, and nothing can convince me different. But nevertheless, it's against all rules of Nature that they are still alive and wearing their hair."

The three Shawnees stalked slowly away, not deigning to glance once behind them. White Fawn, feeling suddenly strange and half afraid of these Long-knives, showed it only by keeping close to Buckner. As a tiny white captive among the Shawnees, she had dogged his every step. Now, as a Shawnee maiden among the whites, she duplicated the performance. The similarity came suddenly to his mind and he smiled down reassuringly into her eyes. She was content with that. Always her thoughts had been with him, even in his absence. And always, even when he had been with her, his busy thoughts had seemed elsewhere. She was close by his side as he returned to Major Donner, with whom Gilpin and Tom Herne were reasoning.

"Better turn back while there's time, Major," Herne counselled. "The whole country set its feet on the warpath two nights back."

"I thought the tribes were relatively quiet now," Donner argued.

"So they was, but a big party of settlers under Colonel Williamson crossed the Ohio and murdered

a swarm of Delaware women and children on the Muskingum. Now every trail to the south echoes with the tread of war parties headed for Kentucky. There's not a brave in any of the nations who hasn't painted for war before now, including the Lake Delawares. You'd best head back across the Ohio swift as your legs will pack you thar."

"Perhaps I am the best judge of that," Donner said, with his usual stiff-necked obstinacy. "I think I shall press on a bit and see for myself just what the conditions are."

"You press on?" Gilpin murmured incredulously. "Are you, then, weary of seeing the moon rise over the Ohio of nights and of hearing the birds sing of a morning?"

Buckner, without further words, had headed for the East with the two Hernes and White Fawn. The swiftness of their gait was convincing proof of the urgency of the situation.

"Well, we've told you what to expect, Major," Gilpin said. "Do as your judgment dictates." And he swung into a trail trot to overtake his vanishing companions.

"Sergeant, lead the way with six men. We will push on to the west for a few miles," Major Donner said.

"Not by a damn sight," declared the big settler thus addressed. "Them four knows Injun sign that other men can't read, same as a houn' dawg can foller a trail that a man can't smell. If it's so bad that they'll hotfoot it out of here at the gait they

took, then me, for one, is anxious to be right at their heels."

He suited his action to his words and headed forthwith toward the point where the woodsmen and White Fawn had disappeared in the forest. The other men followed him, disregarding the commands of the Major, who, red-faced with wrath, was forced to follow them. Such wholesale insubordination on the part of men under unpopular officers was the rule rather than the exception among the volunteer forces of the frontier.

CHAPTER IX

As the news of the murder of the Delawares spread to each isolated settler, that settler dropped all business on the instant and rushed his family to the relative safety of the larger settlements with all possible dispatch. There was not the vestige of a doubt in any man's mind as to the swift and bloody reprisals which were sure to follow.

As Buckner and his companions pressed on up the Ohio toward Fort Pitt, they found every frontier settlement preparing hastily for war. His party overtook a man and his wife and several children struggling up the river with all worldly effects packed upon their live stock.

"Naw, seh—I'm not a-staying," the settler said. "I know what this yere means. I'm takin' my fam'ly back acrost the mountings. I'll nevah live long enough to see peace on the frontier again, so why should I stay on yere and resk the lives of all my folks?"

"Besides being an astonishing low order of butchery," said Gilpin, "it was a mighty short-sighted piece of work. It'll cost the lives of many a hundred white folks that had no hand in it whatever."

"Yeah, so 'twill," the settler assented. "But I dunno as I blame 'em overmuch. The settlers has suffered a sight from Injun raids, and the most part of them has lost friends or kinfolk. 'Twas a murderin'

mess, beyant a doubt, and worthy of the wust of the savages themselves, but it ain't up to me to jedge what provocation they was laborin' under."

That, Buckner found, was largely the sentiment of the frontier. Not condoning the beastly deed, the settlers were yet sufficiently imbued with hatred for all redskins to prevent them from active condemnation of the perpetrators of it.

"The living truth is that many a white of the frontier, after twenty-odd year of border war and mutual reprisals, is scassly less savage than the savages themselves, if any," Gilpin summed it up. "The settlers don't look on the young and squaws of redskins as humans, and they kill 'em same as they do cub b'ars and female panthers. All a man can do is to fight on the side that the color of his hide dictates he should."

All was excitement at Fort Pitt. An immediate campaign against the Indians was urged. Buckner sent word to his uncle that the plans for colonizing in Kentucky must wait for a time at least. Even as this word was dispatched, the news came to Fort Pitt that the Shawnees had struck at all the isolated settlements of Kentucky.

"The reds has gone south to strike in Kentucky, whar they warn't expecting 'em," a prominent settler of Western Pennsylvania said to Buckner. "And while their war parties is down thar is our time to march ag'in Sandusky and destroy their towns."

Buckner and other border woodsmen were not so sure that the Indians, having sent a few war parties

to Kentucky, were not remaining in the Ohio wilderness with their main forces in anticipation of exactly some such move. But the demand for an expedition against the Indian towns on the Sandusky grew in popularity. A call was made for volunteers.

While these preparations were being effected, Buckner went with White Fawn to the little settlement of Crenshaw Bottom, where the remaining relatives of Patricia Lander, recently White Fawn of the Shawnee nation, resided. Crenshaw Bottom was too far removed from present frontiers to be subjected to savage invasion and its inhabitants had prospered moderately. This was Buckner's first acquaintance with people of this type. Those who had always known what it was to live in affluence, such as the landed Virginians of his uncle's class, were the souls of generous hospitality. The hardy settlers of the frontier, devoid of all save the bare necessities of life and frequently devoid even of those, were open-handed to the point of improvidence. No stranger but was welcome to share the last cupful of meal and the last pound of meat. And with the savages among whom he had lived, generosity was a religion before they became contaminated with the acquisitive faculties of the whites. All those he had known. He now met a class of moderately well-to-do land owners, only sufficiently removed from poverty and hardship to fear generosity lest the vice of giving would guide them back to that state, sufficiently short of affluence so that a sense of security and its attendant virtue of generosity was beyond their ken.

Those of the Bottom, all of the same religious sect, had tended to become narrower and more intolerant from isolation. Shrewd and grasping, they viewed with suspicion all who would so much as ask a meal of them without offering twice its worth. Consciously and offensively righteous, they lived by harsh, dogmatic formulas laid down for every act of life. Adamant in their confidence that their own colloquialisms were the oral mainsprings of all religious and civic virtue, any person from outside their little world who differed from them by so much as manner of speech, was viewed as a probable disciple of the devil.

White Fawn was to be taken into the family of her father's brother. None of the family seemed glad at her restoration to them from the heathen. Rather, their attitude was one of pious resignation at thus shouldering an added burden.

"Well," said the aunt. "It's to be hoped that she held steadfast to godly ways."

Her tone indicated that she doubted greatly that such could be the case. Lander, the uncle, had simply taken over his brother's land and possessions at the time that the latter's family had been killed by savages while on a journey ten years before. Shrewd and calculating, he was uneasy as to what claim the girl might have upon her father's former holdings.

"See here," he said to Buckner, "we mout as well git to the bottom of this land matter fust off. Except I've worked brother James' land these last ten years,

it would have gone back to bresh and be wuthless now. It do seem that the girl ortn't to feel no claim to ary acre of it. I'm a righteous man and a just one. But it don't seem squar' to me that she should have claim to any of that bottom land ahead of my own issue."

His own issue, ranging from a son and a daughter of something over White Fawn's own age down to an infant in arms, gazed upon this new cousin with varying degrees of curiosity and hostility. The older ones, dulled by oxlike labor without a spice of excitement or amusement to leaven the uninteresting, unremitting toil, stared stolidly. The younger ones, from whom all spontaneity had not yet been crushed, were shyly friendly.

"Claim or not," Buckner said shortly. "She will not exercise it. She will be guided by what I say in the matter. Consider the land yours for taking her in and treating her well until I come to take her away."

"You take her away?" the woman queried suspiciously. "Well, I couldn't say as we'd let ye. From what Major Donner says, ye're a wild and wasteful man with a heathenish disregard for all proper Christian authority."

"If he deems himself and his pompous officiousness the pillars of proper Christian authority, then there can be no doubt as to my disregard of it," Buckner declared coldly. "But what has Donner to do with it?"

"Nawthing much, exceptin' that he's a godly man

and wouldn't speak ill of ary man without jest cause and provocation," the woman said.

"But even Donner might make mistakes," Lander hastily interposed. "This man seems just and squar', considering the reasonable view he takes as to the girl not having no just claim to James' land."

It was evident that he feared to anger Buckner lest he should reverse his decision. Haughty and arrogant he seemed to be, instead of becomingly pious and conforming, so one could not easily predict how he would act. And they had it from Donner that he was fierce, even savage, and averse to all regulated authority.

"Very well," said Buckner. "We will leave it that way. The land is yours for providing a temporary home for White Fawn until I can come for her. And come for her I shall, whether with your permission or without it."

White Fawn's eyes flashed with loving pride at this declaration. When he had asked her to go with him from among the Shawnees, she had thought of nothing else than that she was to go to his lodge as his wife, according to Indian custom. Then, upon discovering that she was to be left among these strangers, whom, she gathered, were her relatives and under whose authority she would henceforth remain, she had been sadly bewildered. But now his purpose was clear. Then another thought roused her apprehension.

Tonk-a-naw, her Shawnee father's brother, had succeeded that father as head of the lodge upon her

parent's death. Tonk-a-naw had been considering the price that the Redcoat, Kemper, had offered for White Fawn. She understood that Lander, the brother of her dead white father, was now the head of her lodge among the whites, as Tonk-a-naw had been among the Shawnees. Individual ownership of land was of no value to an Indian, hence never included in offers made by aspiring husbands to the head of a lodge for the purchase of a wife. But she had learned that the reverse was true among the whites—that land was their most prized possession. The substance of the conversation regarding the land in question she interpreted from the Shawnee point of view and was vaguely troubled by the hesitancy of her aunt. The woman, she believed, was insisting that Buckner pay a greater price.

"Is it then, that the present head of my lodge refuses the price Talk-with-birds offers for White Fawn?" she inquired of Buckner, in the Shawnee tongue. "And can you not pay the price that they demand?"

Buckner's eyes lighted with swift amusement as he divined her interpretation of the conversation, then deepened with sudden tenderness as he grasped the inner significance of her words. For years he had been so occupied with war as to have given no thought to taking a woman to wife. On the whole, having observed the restrictions that such family ties saddled upon a man, the idea had been vaguely distasteful to him as a probable drag upon the freedom of his actions. Yet marriage had not served to operate that

way among the red men. White Fawn would understand that a man must wander where hunting, war and other pursuits of men chanced to call him. There had always been a deep bond between them. It came to him now, for the first time, that perhaps his former disinclination to contract a civilized marriage had been occasioned, without his being actively conscious of it, by some hidden knowledge that White Fawn was his predestined mate. Gazing now upon her loveliness and the rapt affection in the pansy-blue eyes that looked into his own, he knew it. What other course ever had been open to him? The knowledge came to him with something of a shock. She had been his, wholly and unreservedly, since that first day when he had allayed the fears of a tiny white captive. Always, she had known that she belonged to him. And he, too, had belonged to her from that first day —but he had had no active consciousness of the fact. But he was conscious of it now.

"The price will be ample. No price would be too great to pay to the head of White Fawn's lodge so that she may come to the lodge of Talk-with-birds as his woman," he said in the Shawnee tongue. "These matters are arranged differently among the Long-knives, and they think more of what the man has to offer the bride of his choice than of his offering of a high price to the head of her lodge. Always the thought of White Fawn will warm my heart to life as the rays of the sun stirs to life the roots of the corn so that its grains may ripen to seed. But I go now to the fighting."

"Go, loved one," she said. "But if you do not return, the heart of White Fawn will shrivel and turn hard as a grain of corn, picked while in the milk, shrivels when dried in the sun without having ripened to seed."

As he headed back to the frontier he regretted having left her with people among whom she could not be any too happy. The suddenness with which this new campaign had arisen had rendered it impossible to carry out his original plan of making the long trip back to Great Oaks with her. And he had not a doubt as to the terrible conflict that would soon break out upon the whole frontier, so he had not felt like leaving her in any of the exposed border settlements. He had decided, therefore, to take her to Crenshaw Bottom to these relatives, where, of course, he had expected her to be welcomed with open arms. How could he have known that such narrow, hard and grasping folk existed? Well, she would be safe there, at least, until times cleared again and he could return for her.

Upon his arrival at the frontier, he found settlers pouring in from every quarter and assembling at the appointed spot on the Ohio. These men came self-equipped, self-armed, self-provisioned, each man prepared to fend for himself. The settlers of the frontier had adopted such tactics from the border woodsmen so they could move more swiftly, unhampered by cumbersome commissary and equipment. Years of border warfare had hardened these frontier settlers into the best fighting men in the world, with the pos-

sible exception of the warriors of the Ohio wilderness against whom they fought.

Also, it had whipped them into a body of wild and reckless individualists, fierce and lacking in self-restraint. Fight they would, at every call of duty. Surrender their own personal liberty of action to the command of any officer, they most determinedly would not. There was no longer even a semblance of authority exercised by any militia officers commanding frontier settlers in the West. As early as Dunmore's war, while still commanded by British officers, the Virginia volunteers had openly threatened to kill Governor Dunmore of Pennsylvania, the commander in chief, and prosecute the war themselves when they deemed his peace treaty with the savages premature. The garrison that had risen to slay Cornstalk and his fellow Shawnee braves had done so in open mutiny against the orders of the commanding officers. The detachment that had slain the Delawares so recently had carried out the bloody work over the remonstrance of Colonel Williamson, officer commanding, accompanied with the threat to kill him on the spot if he so much as interfered. A fierce, hard lot, inured to hardship and to danger, calloused to bloodshed by years of war, they were the best that the world afforded for the grim and desperate work of pushing forward the frontier and reclaiming a continent from savagery. Also, the world afforded no men more difficult to command.

Almost five hundred men gathered at the appointed rendezvous on the Ohio. Each came mounted

upon his best horse, since a cavalry campaign had been decided upon. All were keen to cross the Ohio and invade the Indian country.

This common cause, however, was not quite sufficient to prevent several violent altercations between Pennsylvanians and Virginians over boundary matters. A strip of some thirty or forty miles in width was debatable ground, claimed by both factions of settlers. Those who took up land under the laws of either colony were certain to find their titles contested by settlers who claimed rights under the laws of the rival colony.

Gilpin listened to this wrangling over land ownership and boundaries. "All we need to iron out this dispute is for some Connecticut Yank to turn up and claim the hull of the lands from here to the Western seas under that old charter of Connecticut," he said. "Then again, by way of variety, an Iroquois buck should be here to explain that the Iroquois of New York, having once conquered the Western tribes, sold all the West to the whites on the grounds that the lands belonged to the Iroquois by right of conquest. Then the allied tribes of the Ohio ort to have delegates to p'int out as how they owned the land by treaty from the whites, and so had double claim to ownership, since they'd never admitted losing title to it to the conquering Iroquois. With all factions represented, 'stid of only two, it would no doubt be settled satisfactory to all consarned."

He spat disgustedly into the fire and composed himself for sleep.

Again it was strife over land, Buckner reflected. With a whole continent for the taking, why should two men wrangle so desperately over the ownership of any particular piece of it? He was thankful that he had never felt the desire to acquire a piece of land for himself and be forced to defend it against all comers. Some day, of course, he would take up land. All men did. But there was ample time.

CHAPTER X

Upon waking in the morning, the assembled volunteers, with customary promptness to consult their own wishes rather than those of constituted authority, decided to elect officers of their own choosing, which they proceeded to do. Colonel Crawford, retired, was selected as commander in chief. Reluctantly the old veteran left his peaceful home and well-loved family to take command. Many officers found themselves relegated to the ranks for the duration of this particular campaign. Jonathan Zane, of Wheeling, was selected as chief guide, and the command plunged into the wilderness of the Ohio. No Indian sign was encountered. Buckner and other woodsmen, acting under Zane's orders, scoured the forest ahead and on the flanks of the advancing column. These men found evidence that occasional redskin scouts had observed the passing of the troops from various points of vantage. Surprise, therefore, was out of the question.

"Oh, the whole Indian confederacy is kept posted on our movements—no doubt of that," Zane said to Buckner. "We'll never be able to surprise a town of them. But with thirty-odd frontiersmen scouting a mile or two ahead and on either flank, the savages haven't a chance in a hundred to surprise us or draw us into an ambush, so it evens the odds on that score."

"Except that they know where we are and we can only guess where they are," Buckner said. "And they can make us fight on ground of their own choosing or not at all."

"They'll do that, right enough," Zane agreed.

The Muskingum was crossed and still there was no sign of an enemy. Such Indian towns as were passed gave evidence of having been unoccupied for days. There were not even the usual emissaries of peace that were sent forward to treat with the commanders of expeditions into the Indian country when the savages found it inopportune to give battle. As each day led the command many miles deeper into the wilderness, and each night passed without so much as an alarm from the outflung fringe of woodsmen who served as sentinels, there was increasing apprehension among the frontiersmen. Versed in the ways of the redskins, they read ominous portent in this uncanny lack of opposition when in the very heart of the Indian country.

"I don't like the looks of it, Buckner," Zane said. "Neither does the colonel. It has all the appearance that they intend letting us march as deep into their country as we choose before they gather all forces and swoop down on us. We could draw on a battle right now by facing about and turning heads for home. It is my belief that that is exactly what we should do—and that without delay. Colonel Crawford is firmly of the opinion. What do the scouts think of it?"

Buckner shrugged.

"When the geese and swans hurry south in the fall,

we know that winter approaches," he said. "And to every woodsman in the lot the signs are no less clear than they are to you and the colonel. They believe as you do—that we would be no more than a half-day's journey on the homeward way before we would have fighting on our hands in plenty. It cannot be otherwise."

A conference was called and the men apprised of the views of their commander and of the scouts. Zane was particularly forceful in expressing himself. The men felt that the return of such a large and well-equipped force without striking a single blow or taking a scalp would weaken the cause of the settlers and put heart in the savages. They were, nevertheless, impressed by the uniformity of opinion exhibited by their commander, their chief scout and every border woodsman with the outfit.

"I'll guarantee a bellyfull of fighting for every last man of you before we're a half-day's march on our back track," Zane declared. "Have no doubt of that."

But the men insisted that they should push on at least a little farther in hopes of establishing contact with the enemy. It was decided that one more day's march should be made, then a return toward the Ohio. This plan, necessarily, was adopted.

Round noon of the following day, Buckner, having been on sentinel duty throughout the night, rode near the rear of the column when there was a sudden commotion ahead. The war whoop mingled with the war of musketry and the wild cheers of the settlers who rode in advance. The horsemen in the rear advanced

at a sharp trot, deploying through the forest and charging to the aid of their comrades ahead. By the time Buckner arrived at the edge of a belt of open prairie, the warriors, a hundred or more, already were being driven from the shelter of a sizable patch of timber that stood out in the center of the open expanse. The foremost settlers had routed the last savages from this grove before the rearmost horseman charged up. Woodsmen raced in from the flanks to announce that warriors were pouring through the forest in every direction.

In the shelter of the grove, the settlers rested their panting horses while waiting to discover the whereabouts of the main band of savages, so as to launch an effective charge. No sizable body of the enemy appeared, however. Scores of braves crawled within musket range in the tall grass and began to pour in a galling fire. The settlers shot back at the white puffs of smoke in the grass. Night descended without a sortie on either side.

When morning came, the settlers found their retreat surrounded by concealed savages and the long-range duel was continued. Leaden slugs whined nastily into the thicket and sang of death as they glanced from tree trunks or ricocheted from the ground. There was the occasional impact of lead upon flesh and the cry of some stricken settler. Each man, however, had taken to shelter and the horses suffered more than the men. Here and there a horse screamed in anguish. Others threshed about in their dying agonies on the ground. From all sides the heavy de-

tonations of muskets merged into a jarring rumble, and high above all sounds of battle sounded the high-pitched gabbling yelps of the war whoop that rose from hundreds of savage throats.

Not once during all that time did a savage show himself in the open within musket range. Shooting back into smoke puffs from the tall grass was the only recourse of the settlers. Every savage, knowing that the smoke of his musket would draw fire, rolled sidewise on the instant of discharging it and thus rendered the return fire of the settlers ineffective.

Late in the afternoon a contingent of some two hundred Shawnee warriors were seen approaching down the belt of prairie land to reinforce the besiegers. Later, a party of fifty fierce Wyandotte braves appeared, accompanied by Kemper and Benoit. Small war parties from every one of the allied tribes swarmed in, most of them accompanied by white renegades.

"It came about as we expected, Colonel Crawford," Zane said. "We are outnumbered more than two to one and with fresh arrivals charging on to the scene every hour. It will be night soon, and under cover of it we'd best make a speedy shift towards the Ohio."

Colonel Crawford nodded agreement.

"These are fighting men we have with us," he said. "We can cut our way through."

Toward nightfall there was a lull in the firing as concealed savages squirmed back through the grass and drew beyond musket range. Through the ensuing

quiet, men raised their voices on either side to hurl taunts at the enemy.

Buckner saw Kemper and Benoit standing with a group of savage chiefs beyond musket range. Kemper was no longer a member of the British army. Violation of a parole was a serious matter when it was customary to release officers on both sides on oath of parole. The colonial authorities had made urgent representation to the British army to the effect that Kemper was not an escaped prisoner but an officer liberated on a parole which he had violated. The British, therefore, rather than endanger the parole system, had cashiered Kemper from the army. He was now a trader among the Indians of the West.

Savage chiefs and renegade white men could be heard calling out orders to the warriors. Delawares shouted fierce threats of the vengeance they would wreak in retaliation for the slaying of their relatives. Then, suddenly, British cavalry began to wheel into the picture. If there had been any lingering doubt in the minds of the settlers as to the truth of their scouts' assertions that redskin spies had watched every move of the expedition, it was now removed. Fast runners had relayed the news of the start of their march, and from distant Detroit the British cavalry had pressed forward with all dispatch to aid the allied tribes in the battle.

"Well," Gilpin observed to Buckner, "if the men had listened to Zane and the colonel and turned back before now, they'd still have had their fill of fighting, but not agin the entire allied nations and the British

army throwed it. It bids fair to be a warmish job, working our way clear of this."

"Hell!" growled a settler who had overheard the remark. "We'll fight through. We come out to fight. Not a man in the lot was timid enough to turn back without so much as a brush with the miscreants."

"Oh, as to courage," Gilpin said easily, "there's never been a doubt in my mind but what the average settler on the frontier has a sight too much courage instead of too little."

"How can a man have too much?" the settler demanded.

"The lynx is brave enough but has a wholesale respect for the quills of the porcupine, so he slays the quill hog by cunning," said Gilpin. "A wolverine, the most ferocious and courageous of varmints, can whip a whole forest full of lynxes without overexerting himself. Yet the wolverine rushes in and slams a porcupine round and tears it to pieces, until he causes his own undoing by filling his own mouth, throat and belly with porcupine quills. 'Tis why the mighty wolverines are few in the forest while there is no scarcity of the more cautious lynxes. Courage is an admirable vartue, but it works best when tempered with caution."

"Caution never won battles with redskins and fetched in the scalps," the settler insisted. "It's courage that does it."

"Well, in my case, I've been on the border for fifty-odd year, in which time I've lifted enough redskin hair to make a fair load for a pack horse," said

Gilpin. "Such hair as I've lost in that time, as you'll notice, has been removed from my head by the processes of Nature and not persuaded away from my skull by a knife in the hands of a savage. Meanwhile, I've obsarved the scalp locks of many equally courageous but less cautious men curing in the smoke of the savages' camp fire and there's many others whose trails I no longer cross in the woods."

The firing had ceased save for an occasional demonstration on the part of a few savages. Darkness descended. There was little sound save for the voices of leaders among the enemy. The savages had a natural aversion for night fighting so it seemed certain that no general attack would be made before dawn. Colonel Crawford, the veteran commander, seized upon that trait of redskin nature. Under cover of what purported to be the construction of defenses and the kindling of outlying fires as if to guard against night surprise, the settlers prepared for immediate retreat. It was certain that scouts had crept close to spy upon the activities of the beleaguered forces and to report on the nature of all overheard conversations. False orders were given as to the posting of sentries and men called to one another about cutting logs and dragging them with their horses for the construction of breastworks. With the tomahawks of those who were to bring up the rear still ringing against tree trunks as they sat their horses, the head of the column was already riding straight out across the open space toward the edge of the forest on the side nearest the Ohio.

Suddenly the savages in the line of march, roused by the trample of horses that were almost upon them, leaped up with frightful yells of rage and surprise. With a cheer the foremost ranks of settlers charged headlong through the night. The savages, believing that a detachment of settlers had launched a night surprise attack, gave way to either side and the column broke through their ranks. Warriors fired from the flanks and the settlers fired back, indulging in short charges to either side on the part of small contingents by way of feinting general flank movements. Those who were wounded and fell from their horses without being observed by their comrades fought desperately to the last and the fight resolved itself into a series of individual duels, the flames of the muskets spitting crimson streaks through the black shadows. With all the attendant confusion, the fact that the main body of settlers had broken through and were riding hard toward the east did not dawn on the enemy for several minutes. Then the voices of chiefs and renegade white men were to be heard, roaring out orders for reinforcements as the pursuit began.

Some of the horses of the settlers became mired in bogs or trapped in matted tangles of windfall trees and had to be deserted, their riders striking out on foot. Here and there a few wounded made a determined last stand; and the foremost of the savages, fearful of running into a general ambuscade, were retarded in their pursuit. Always, too, there were sudden frenzied rushes on the part of a few riderless

horses at the approach of the savages, and the latter, apprehensive of a rear-guard action, were confused on each such occasion. Small parties of settlers, veering aside to skirt marshes or other obstructions, found themselves well off on the flanks of the main body. Parties of warriors, swinging wide with intent to outflank the retreating troops, ran foul of those small strayed detachments of settlers, who promptly gave fight and so the outflanking warriors, too, were held up while the main command of the colonists rode hard and fast toward the east.

Many a settler, hearing a call for help, gave a hand-up to some wounded and unhorsed companion and carried the helpless one to safety behind his saddle or across the horse's neck before him.

Buckner, riding near the rear, was hailed by a voice from the night:

"Could you help me, friend? I'm shot through the leg and dismounted. The man with me has got lead in his ribs."

Buckner swung from the saddle to find a stalwart youth of sixteen summers and a man thrice his age. Both were wounded and unable to proceed on foot.

"Quick!" Buckner ordered, and gave the youth a lift to the saddle, then swung the older man up behind him. "Give the horse his head and he'll overtake the column."

"But you!" the young man protested. "We'll not leave you afoot."

"I'd have quit his back anyhow," Buckner said.

"I can out-travel any horse through forest and swamp on a dark night like this and would rather trust my own two feet than a horse's four in this sort of a ruckus."

He slapped the horse on the rump and the nervous animal started swiftly on in the wake of the retreating troops.

"I quit my own horse half a mile back for no other reason than that I feel as you do about trusting my own feet," said a voice from the forest, and Buckner found Gilpin running beside him.

From behind them came a spasmodic outbreak of rifle fire and a volley of war whoops reeking with vindictive triumph.

"Some few poor devils got cut off back there and are making a fight for it," Buckner said.

The two ran silently for several miles. A broad swamp forced them to turn to the right and led them much farther in that direction than they had intended to go. They rounded it at last and swung again to the left toward the route that the main column would follow. Within a mile, both halted as one and stepped to a huge oak trunk as the sound of stealthy footfalls reached their ears.

"Savages," Buckner whispered. "Their tread is too light for that of white men."

"There was a more direct route through the swamp and they took it," Gilpin whispered back.

Fifty yards to their left a voice spoke a few words in the Shawnee tongue.

"Shawnees," Buckner said. "Shuck off your jacket

and tie its sleeves round your waist. Tuck your cap in your belt. We'll fall in behind them. If we should run foul of them, they could scarce tell us from part of their party, dark as it is."

They followed the diminishing sound of the padded tread of the Shawnee war party and found themselves on a faintly worn forest path. The savages were traveling in haste with the evident purpose of covering all possible distance to the east in the hope of encountering and cutting off stragglers. Buckner took the lead and kept pace with the savages a hundred yards ahead of him. At dawn the forest would be swarming with warriors on the lookout for fugitives. It was imperative that the two woodsmen should put all possible distance between themselves and the scene of the fight before morning. By holding to this path in the wake of the war party they could make twice the time that could be attained by casting through trackless forest, circling swamps and dodging windfall jams while still striving to travel with absolute silence.

At intervals of two or three minutes, Buckner halted for a single second to listen. If the sound of soft tramping came from ahead, he moved on. If such footfalls had ceased, he stood motionless until they were resumed again, knowing that the war party would halt on occasion to listen for straggling parties of settlers. During one such halt the silence continued for so long a space that Buckner knelt with ear to the ground, thinking that perhaps the Shawnees had passed beyond earshot. Just as he heard

them resume their march, a voice spoke in Shawnee from close at hand in the blackness.

"What do you there?" the savage demanded.

"Listening for the heavy feet of Long-knives fleeing through the forest," Buckner returned instantly in a low tone, slipping his tomahawk from his belt.

"Why did you fall so far behind?" the warrior asked.

"We fell out of line to listen, believing that we heard a horse in the distance," said Buckner. "It was but a deer."

"Step on ahead of me then," the Shawnee instructed, evidently still suspicious. The warrior knew that scores of white men spoke the Shawnee tongue perfectly.

As Buckner moved to obey, still unable to make out even the form of his interlocutor in the blackness, a cold shock passed through him as a hand reached forth and explored his naked torso. The feel of bare skin where a white man would have been clothed with buckskin or cloth reassured the savage and he grunted his satisfaction as he fell in behind Buckner. That grunt was his last. As he stepped into the trail, it brought his skull within range of the old woodsman's tomahawk, which was buried deep in his brain on the instant. Buckner stopped in his tracks, knowing full well the meaning of that one crunching blow and the thud of a heavy body falling to the trail almost on his heels.

"It was a chance I had to take—that I'd strike him so dead he couldn't let out a screech," Gilpin whis-

pered. "He'd have addressed some question to me inside the next few rods; and while I speak the Shawnee tongue, it is after the manner in which a Dutchman maltreats the English language. He'd have knowed me for a white man and raised the alarm. Give me a hand with the remainders. We'll move it off the trail so the fust war party won't stumble on to it."

Buckner stooped and laid hold of the dead warrior's feet as Gilpin lifted his shoulders. Depositing the savage behind a down log a dozen feet from the trail, Gilpin stripped the scalp from his quarry. Both men flattened silently behind the log as the soft tramp of many feet reached their ears.

The thudding came closer and the leaders of another big war party drew abreast of their retreat and passed almost within arm's reach. The thump of moccasined feet seemed interminable, as if that sinister procession would never pass. They could feel, rather than see, that long line of ferocious warriors streaming by without a word, the silence of the forest unbroken save for that dull thud of feet. Then even that sound ceased. Every one of the long line of warriors had stopped in his tracks. For a space of ten seconds, the same thought filled the minds of both woodsmen—that the savages, with that uncanny, animal-like faculty for sensing what went on in the forest round them, had somehow become aware of their presence. The muscles of both men were tensed for the first spring of a desperate flight through the night in case of discovery. That dead silence seemed fraught with every sinister signifi-

cance. But it was merely one of the usual halts to listen for the progress of fugitives. Presently there was the faint cheep of a night bird and every savage stepped forward as one. The last of the war party passed and the thud of feet died out in the distance. Gilpin released a pent sigh of relief.

"This forest is sure a-boiling with savages," he said. "We could make better time on the trail but we'd soon run up on some of those ahead or some would run up on us from behind. We'll have to keep off it."

"Most of them will hold close to the general route of the column," Buckner said. "Our best chance is to angle southeast and make it through by ourselves without trying to rejoin the command."

Throughout the night they made their way through the forest, skirting swamps, wading streams and climbing windfalls. Dawn found them thirty miles from the scene of the fight. They spent the day in a dense expanse of down timber and started on again at night. Eventually, they reached the Ohio and crossed it.

The main body of settlers had managed to hold together and return in safety. Some few stragglers continued to reach the Ohio along a broad front, clear from Fort Pitt to Wheeling. The final check-up revealed that some seventy men had been killed. Colonel Crawford, it was learned later, had been captured and burned alive by the Lake Delawares while a group of renegade white men looked on.

"The frontier settlers are l'arning the woods and

the ways of the redskins till they've become the best fighting men top side of ground, if only they'd temper courage with caution," Gilpin said. "This affair proves it. They was outnumbered three to one in the heart of the Injun country and fit their way clean back to the settlements with a loss of but seventy men. If it had been regular sojers caught in that mess, even if the odds had been reversed so they outnumbered the savages, it's not likely a tenth of them would have come out of the woods wearing their hair. Taking that view of the matter, 'twas almost a victory."

But the frontier did not consider it a victory. The whole border was thrown into a panic at this disastrous defeat of the best body of fighting men that the frontier afforded. It was certain that the savages would swoop on every isolated settlement. War parties would scour the hills. Small bands of savages would lie in ambush along every trail and artery of travel and haunt the woods to waylay travelers and parties of hunters. These forebodings were realized. War parties swooped upon various settlements. Every new sunrise was ushered in with the fear of hearing the dread war whoop. No man's life was safe except when he remained within the walls of a blockhouse. Men were shot down as they worked in the fields, their wives and children carried off to captivity. Haastown, Pennsylvania, was sacked and burned to the ground. And under cover of these depredations on the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiers, the main body of savages had marched

secretly to Kentucky under the leadership of the same renegade whites who had commanded at Crawford's defeat.

The news of various minor engagements and the defeat of small parties of Kentucky settlers reached the settlements of the Upper Ohio. Then a woodsman came up the river with the tidings of the disastrous defeat of Daniel Boone's forces at Blue Licks.

"They'd set out on the trail of several hundred Injuns that had attacked Bryant's station," the woodsman told Buckner. "When they come to the river Boone p'inted out an ambush on the far side. The woodsmen all throwed in with him and done their best to hold the men back. But thar's a sizable array of sojers and officers from the Eastern armies come to settle in Kentucky the past year or two. They'd fit trained white sojers in battle and warn't afraid of no redskin rabble, they says. They wouldn't even wait for Logan and his four hundred men to come up. One man shoved Boone aside and put his horse at the river, shouting for all who wasn't cowards to follow his lead. They all boiled across and rode up a bare ridge flanked on both sides by timber. Then the savages poured it in from both flanks and the front. It was sartinly one bloody shambles. In twenty minutes thar was close to a hundred men shot down or captured, Boone's son amongst the lot, and the savage loss was so triflin' it warn't wuth mentioning."

Terror reigned on the frontier. But despite continued disasters, aspiring settlers poured westward across the passes of the Cumberlands to Kentucky

and flooded into the outlying settlements of Western Pennsylvania and Virginia. When that year came to an end, hundreds of whites had been slain by the redskins and it is doubtful if the whole Indian confederacy of the Ohio had lost fifty braves. But despite such reverses, the white population of the western frontier had increased. Single cabins and colonies sprang up for hundreds of miles along the settlement side of the Ohio. Its far shore, just west of Pennsylvania and Western Virginia and north of Kentucky flaunted its rich lands and invited the aspiring land seekers to come and tomahawk their rights upon the trees. But except for the border woodsmen, endowed with the cunning of foxes, of all those who ventured to prowl on the Ohio side of the river few ever returned. The Ohio River still was the dead line after more than twenty years of war on the border.

CHAPTER XI

The flatboat glided smoothly down the broad bosom of the Ohio.

"Work her over a bit more to the left," Buckner ordered. Two brawny black men tugged at the great oars that were mounted on the bulwarks, one at either side, while a third slave manned the after sweep. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the great boat edged closer to the left-hand shore.

"Enough! Steady her! Don't let her get into slack water," Buckner said.

Lucia Harper, sister of his uncle's wife, turned mischievous eyes up to him.

"Are you afraid that the very air of that northern shore will poison us?" she demanded. "And I had pictured you as so bold and fearless," she mildly scoffed. "Instead I find you cautious to an amazing degree."

He nodded, smiling down at her. They gazed at the age-old forest that decked the Ohio shore. Save for the usual flights and voices of birds, there was no sign of life. The forest floor beneath those ranks of mighty trees seemed but peaceful dells that had never known the tread of human feet. But Buckner knew that deadly menace lurked there.

His uncle's wife, Becky, joined them and rested her hand on his arm.

"Your eyes always rest on the wilderness shore, never on the Kentucky side," she chided. "Does your heart, then, so yearn for the wilderness that you cannot even turn your gaze on the settlement side? Myself, I find the Kentucky shore lovely—the site of our future home, the new Virginia."

"It is not only the wilderness shore but the Indian shore," he said, indicating the Ohio side with a nod. "I have no desire to let the boat drift into slack water under that bank and within easy musket range of lurking savages. And you'll find that there is more wilderness than settlements, a hundred to one, even in Kentucky."

"Soon there will be peace, as the Indians come to understand us," Lucia predicted. "Then there will be quiet homes over there where all is now wilderness."

"The Indians understand us all too well now," Buckner said. "Peace will be only temporary, for the very reason that you mention. A single year of peace will induce white men to attempt to settle on the Ohio side in violation of all treaties. Then the savages will rise again and go on the warpath, knowing that if they do not they will be driven from the Ohio, as already they have been driven westward beyond it."

"Then what will be the end of it all?" Lucia wanted to know.

"The end of the Indian," Buckner prophesied. "The Indian will fight to the last to retain a part of his lands, and so long as he retains a square foot of land that the whites can take from him, they will never rest satisfied until it is taken."

Ever since that morning when he had stood gazing out across the Illinois prairies, he had never had a doubt as to the ultimate outcome of the struggle between the two races with unalterably opposite viewpoints, the one believing in general ownership, the other in individual control of the land. It would be a war to the death.

"There is a note of sadness in your voice as you prophesy the fate of the red men at the hands of the whites," Lucia chided him gaily. "I believe you like them better than you do your own race."

"I have fought on the side of my race," he said, a bit coldly.

It was that occasional cold aloofness that piqued the girl. She was accustomed to the charmingly obsequious suitors who, on the surface at least, deferred to her point of view in all matters. She could not know that Buckner's heart was back in a little backwash settlement in Pennsylvania where the girl White Fawn dwelt among harshly righteous people from whom he was anxious to take her. He was all impatience for this journey to end so that he might be free to go to her.

"I know you have fought on the side of your race," she conceded.

"But my sympathy goes out to the Indians as a vanishing people," he said. "Already, the more intelligent among them realize the inevitable end. There is a calm despair among them and they fight only to delay the finish. Too proud to become the despised and landless vassals of a conquering race, they pre-

fer to die. And as for liking them, they have many good traits."

"Good traits!" Lucia exclaimed. "How can one see good traits in savages who slay women and children?"

"As to that, Miss," Gilpin said from behind them, "we must admit that the whites have give the reds lessons in savagery from the first. French, English, Dutch and Spanish settlers alike have exterminated whole redskin nations from the day when the first white man set foot on American shores. And speaking of unprovoked killings, from the close of Pontiac's war in sixty-three down to Dunmore's War in seventy-four, records will prove what I know of my own knowledge—that as many harmless Injuns was murdered by whites as thar was settlers massacred by the reds."

"I can scarcely credit that," the girl declared.

"Ask Buckner," Gilpin advised. "He'll tell you the same. And on many an occasion the whites has proved as merciless to the women and children of friendly Injuns whose land they wanted as the savages themselves have in raids on white settlements. Look into the matter, unbiased like, Miss, and even torture was inflicted on the Injuns by the Spaniards, down to suckling babes, to twenty times the number of whites that has been put to the fire by the savages. Even scalping is a custom they picked up from the whites, as I've l'arned from the best authority. The New Englanders made a practice of putting the heads of slain redskins on poles round their settlements, King Philip's among them. The yaller-hides adopted the

custom, but varied it by merely removing the hair, which sarves the same parpose when hung in their lodges and is a lot easier transported than the whole human head."

The young woman shuddered daintily.

"I do believe that all you woodsmen favor the Indians above those of your own race and blood," she accused.

"As to that," Gilpin said, "we stand with those whose skins favor our own in color, as 'tis fitting we should, and as our deeds prove that we do. But we face facts as they are without inventing pretty fairy tales to justify our misdeeds. When we lift the scalp of a redskin 'tis with full belief that he had an equal right to separate us from our hair if he'd been sufficiently wily to carcumvent us. As to relative degrees of savagery betwixt them as wears yaller hides and them as wears white, I still maintain thar ain't much —the chief difference resting in the fact that the white man has a better brain in his skull on the average."

A settler named Harmon, who had lost his land in the boundary dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia and who was going to Kentucky to seek out new buildings, came up to make some inquiry of Gilpin.

Buckner turned to look back at the three flatboats that followed, strung out for half a mile in the current of the Ohio. The leading boat on which he stood carried his uncle's family, Lucia Harper, three black male slaves and two female servants, together

with Harmon, Gilpin and a half dozen young Virginians who desired to become members of the Buckner colony and to take up land adjacent to that which the elder Buckner would file on under his warrants. The Buckner household effects also were stored on the leading boat, together with several wagons. The next two boats, loaded with live stock, were manned by additional slaves and by a dozen settlers who, like Harmon, had lost title to their lands through boundary disputes and were heading west to take up new land. It had been at Buckner's suggestion that those men, accustomed to the rough life of the border, had been selected as members of his uncle's colony in preference to choosing the entire personnel from among young Virginia blades of no frontier experience. The rear boat contained the families and household effects of such of the settlers as had not elected to leave their families behind until such time as quarters and defenses could be erected on the new holdings. The two Hernes rode that rear boat with two settlers.

After assuring himself that all was well with the following boats, Buckner's gaze returned to the Ohio shore and ranged ahead. Boats now came down the Ohio almost daily and the savages, lurking along the wilderness shore, took heavy toll. They would scarcely set off in their frail bark canoes to attack such a strongly manned flotilla as this one, from which the whites could fire upon them from behind bulwarks. But it was inconceivable that they would make no attempt whatever to take such a valuable prize.

"Your precious savages haven't discovered us yet," Lucia Harper said brightly.

Gilpin, as the occasional bawling of cattle and squealing of pigs reached his ears from the boats behind, allowed his eyes to inspect the film of smoke that ascended from the four cook fires of the boats, then turned a quizzical gaze upon her.

"No doubt thar's a few braves among the allied tribes of the Ohio that ain't yet l'arned of this expedition," he commented dryly.

Buckner, gazing far ahead, said suddenly to Gilpin, "Drop back to the cattle boats. Don't let them put in toward the shore."

Following the direction of Buckner's gaze, the woodsman nodded and entered a skiff which he paddled against the current so that the cattle boats would overtake him. The women saw two white men run along an open space on the Ohio shore a few hundred yards ahead of the boat. They signalled its occupants to head in toward them.

"What is it?" Buckner called, as the boat drew almost abreast of the men.

The voice of one of the distant figures drifted faintly back to them, declaring that they had been captured by savages and had escaped; that their pursuers were close behind and would recapture them and put them to death unless the boats came to their rescue.

"Oh! Hurry!" Lucia breathed at Buckner's side. "Hurry to them!"

Buckner shook his head.

"Do you mean that you will let the savages take them?" the young woman demanded. "That would be the trick of a coward!"

The elder Buckner joined them.

"They need assistance," he said. "Do you mean you will not put in for them?"

"It is a hundred to one that they are decoys sent out by the savages to lure us ashore," Buckner said.

"I cannot take the chance of leaving two unfortunates of my own race at the mercy of savages!" the elder man declared in great agitation. He turned and shouted an order to the slaves to head the boat for the Ohio shore. The group of young Virginians seized their rifles and manned the bulwarks.

"Hold the boat as she is!" Buckner roared to the blacks, countermanding his uncle's orders.

The Virginians had been under arms throughout the Revolution. Fearless and of high temper, it was unthinkable that they should hold to their course rather than to face possible danger to rescue two of their own race from death.

"I am in command of this expedition!" Buckner coldly informed them. Then, to the blacks, "Hold the boat on her course!"

The two men were now running abreast of the boat and making frenzied appeals to be taken on board.

"Take off your caps!" Buckner shouted.

They pretended not to hear until he roared a repetition. Then they whipped off their coonskin

caps. Their heads were shaved save for scalp locks. They seemed to divine that there was some woodsman aboard who knew savage customs.

"The savages didn't shave our heads," one's voice came faintly. "We're woodsmen and we wear it that way."

"Then swim off to the boats!" Buckner called back.

"We can't swim!" one man shouted. "For God's sake, don't leave us to be killed by the reds!"

They were dropping back now, making their frenzied appeals to the occupants of the first cattle boat, which Gilpin already had boarded. Buckner calmly disregarded the anxious pleas and reproaches of his passengers. The elder Buckner declared such base desertion was a stain on his honor. The fiery young Virginians would have been unrestrainedly mutinous except for the fact that they felt assured that the hardy settlers on the two cattle boats would put ashore for the fugitives. The two women accused Buckner of being a feelingless monster.

"The other boats will put in for them!" Lucia declared.

"Not if Gilpin and the two Hernes have their say in the matter," Buckner predicted.

It was only when the last boat had passed the two men that Lucia, looking back at the two distant figures abandoned there on the shore, burst into tears and a storm of reproaches. The Virginians were openly scornful. The elder Buckner, having vast confidence in his nephew's knowledge of the savages and the ways of the wilderness, was distressed never-

theless. Gilpin was dropping downstream again in the skiff to reboard the lead boat.

"Quit carrying on!" Harmon, the settler advised the passengers. "Buckner knows what he's at."

"I don't see how he could be certain that they were not fugitives," one of the Virginians, Captain Farris, asserted. "Personally, I'm sure that they were."

"Personally, you'll sacrifice your scalp to no purpose if you rely on your own scatter-brained jedgment instead of heeding them as knows wilderness ways," Gilpin said, as he boarded the boat.

"Now," Buckner said to Farris, "I will take you aside and inform you how I knew. Gilpin will take another of you and Harmon a third. With no words between us as to why I chose not to stop, each of us will tell one of your number exactly why the whole thing was as clearly a trap in his estimation as a printed page would be clear to you."

Farris followed him to the far side of the boat.

"Those men's heads were shaved save for scalp locks. The Indians of the Ohio absolutely never shave the head of a captive unless it is the intent to adopt him. In which case, they were in no danger at the hands of the savages. When they discovered that I knew that custom they proclaimed themselves woodsmen who wore their hair that way from choice, which would be natural enough—except that they pretended that they could not swim to the boats. There's not a woodsman the length of the frontier but who could swim the Ohio without giving much thought to it. There are scores of whites that have become natu-

ralized Indians. Every tribe has them in plenty. It is regular custom for them to attempt to lure flatboaters ashore. They were dressed as whites for the occasion and the forest behind them was swarming with braves."

He turned and walked back to the others. The young Virginians compared notes and found that the diagnosis of the three woodsmen had been identical.

"Reading all such sign is everyday habit with us, as a matter of necessity," Gilpin explained. "A common ruse of the redskins, that is, and one you'll see more of, beyant doubt, before the journey is ended."

The boats glided on down the placid face of the Ohio. Once a party of woodsmen hailed them from the Kentucky shore and called out a warning against touching on the Ohio side to take off fugitives. The lazy afternoon sun beat down. The negroes began to voice soft singsong chants, through the chords of which were woven the unconscious melancholy of their race. The elder Buckner was for quieting them, lest their voices apprise the savages of their whereabouts.

"Let them sing," Buckner said. "The savages don't need that to inform them. They have eyes—and scouts posted the length of the Ohio on the lookout for flatboats. They have us under observation every moment."

Night fell again and enveloped them in steel-blue obscurity, shut in by the velvet black walls of the flanking forests. The woodsmen were on the alert for the stealthy dip of paddles that would presage a night attack by war canoes. A red illumination

revealed a savage camp on the Ohio shore. Figures moved about, pygmy forms at the foot of the giant trees, and frenzied voices drifted in a raucous hum to the boatmen.

"A drinking spree," Buckner said. "They've captured some boat or have secured rum from some trader."

The savages shrieked imprecations as the boats passed. From below the fire, the black wall of the forest was punctuated here and there by crimson flashes, followed by heavy reports as drunken savages fired their muskets. Spent balls chugged into the river with hollow impacts. Presently the moon rose and transformed the river into a pathway of uneasy silver down which they glided toward the promised land.

Shortly after breakfast, Farris and another of the Virginians took a skiff and dropped back to the cattle boats. Perhaps two hours later, a wild shriek sounded from the forest and drew all eyes in the lead boat to the Ohio shore. A white woman, stripped bare and followed by a girl of around seven years of age, equally denuded of clothing, ran frenziedly along the shore, holding out her arms in supplication to the occupants of the boat. She cast fearful glances behind her as she ran.

Again there was a clamor from the occupants of the boat for a rescue.

"Hold fast!" Buckner ordered. "It is a shallower ruse than the last. Notice how dark the body of the child is, except round the hips? She's been living

much in the sun with nothing on but a breechclout. The skin of the woman, of course, is white throughout, because she's been clothed in buckskin, as are all squaws. Their cries are unintelligible, you'll notice. They have been so long with the savages as to have forgotten their own tongue, otherwise they'd call out to us in English."

"Then they should be rescued in any event and returned to their own race," the Virginians hotly insisted. At that juncture a hail from the cattle boat just behind drew all eyes to the rear. Farris and his companion, despite Gilpin's shouted orders to return, had put off in a skiff and were pulling swiftly toward the Ohio shore.

"Some are not too fearful to attempt a rescue," Lucia Harper said proudly. Her eyes danced with excitement as the boat neared the shore. Then she gave a stifled bleat of horror as a frightful cry rose from the forest and a dozen painted savages swarmed forth and seized Farris and his fellow Virginian. Her horrified gaze beheld Farris struggling in the grip of brawny arms while other savages cut down his companion with their tomahawks and tore off his scalp. One of them waved the bloody trophy vindictively at the boats. Others led the captive Farris to the water's edge.

The girl was sick with terror, her face blanched white.

"Will you go to his rescue?" she demanded faintly of Buckner.

"Can't be done," he answered shortly. "That is

why they hold him there for us to see. There's a hundred more back in the forest, hoping that we will attempt a rescue."

Before she could reply, Farris' voice came to their ears in a sudden hail.

"Keep off! There's hundreds more in the woods. Th—"

His utterance was cut short as a warrior who understood English struck him sharply across the mouth.

Knowing that their plans had failed, a hundred or more painted warriors leaped from concealment and brandished their tomahawks at the boats, to the accompaniment of hideous war whoops. The luckless Farris was led back out of sight by two braves. The whole face of the forest was swarming with savages. A smaller group appeared abreast of the leading boat.

"There are white men among them!" one of the Virginians exclaimed.

Buckner nodded.

"Renegades," he said. "No doubt my friends Benoit and Kemper are there among them. They have been very active in leading the Indians in flatboat outrages of late."

A voice rose from among this latter group.

"Missed you this time, Buckner, but we'll have you tied to a stake before long! I've promised five hundred pounds reward to the warrior that brings me your scalp!"

"The redskins know that the one who violates all

promises to those of his own race would never keep one made to them," Buckner shouted back. Then he lifted his voice in Shawnee and the yelling savages ceased their clamor to catch his words as the familiar language reached their ears. "Warriors, it is known that the British took off Kemper's red coat because a false black heart beat beneath it. Their ears are deaf when he speaks because his tongue is forked and his words are wind. The voice of the bullfrog who hides in the slime is as loud as that of the bear, but who of us trembles when the bullfrog roars from his mudhole? Any among you who can take Buckner's scalp is welcome. But I counsel you to sell it for a charge of powder or a drink of rum to the first honest man that covets it, for Kemper's promise of much gold is worth less than either."

Kemper's voice came back faintly in horrible blasphemy. The girl, pale and terror-ridden, widened her eyes in surprise as a grim smile wreathed Buckner's face in realization of a poisonous shaft driven home in the heart of his enemy. An hour later she came back to him.

"Captain Farris raised his voice to warn us, even at cost of his life," she said.

"The British may ransom him. They always have bought such condemned captives as they could from the savages. After all, there are not many among them as bloody-minded as Hamilton was. Even when the hair-buyer was offering a price for settlers' scalps and nothing for prisoners, British officers and traders bought the life of many a captive and ex-

changed or paroled him back to the colonists. I'm hoping they will do that for Farris."

"He was so brave, standing there alone," the girl choked.

"There is no fear in Farris," Buckner said. "Virginians, in fact, are too recklessly brave, rather than too cautious. That was the chief reason why I insisted upon more border settlers, schooled in the ways of the frontier rather than men of Captain Farris' type for the new colony. Such men as Farris are overapt to sacrifice their lives to no purpose through some chivalrous impulse. That won't do in a border settlement. It would leave all the women and children at the mercy of the reds. Backwoods settlers are preferable for that reason."

Captain Farris had been a favorite among the young Virginians of the expedition. The loss of the gallant Revolutionary officer and his companion had dampened the spirits of the others. Some time later one of them approached Buckner.

"I hear that the Hernes' brother is a renegade among the savages," he said.

"Not a renegade, though among them," Buckner corrected. "There are men of white blood, though indistinguishable from the savages, in many a war party. The Indian towns are full of them. They were captured when young and know nothing else than the life of the redskins. They are naturalized Indians, not renegades."

"Yet you named those whites back there renegades," the man said.

"Because they have deserted to the savages from choice, to plunder against those of their own race," Buckner explained. "William Herne is as true a Shawnee as any that was born in their lodges. During peace times he is my friend. Benoit and Kemper are monsters, and during war times or peace, their throats will know the feel of my knife if ever I am granted opportunity to slit them."

Lucia Harper, overhearing this assertion as she drew near, shuddered slightly.

"I see your point," the Virginian said. "And it is rightly taken. But Kemper led the Indians as a British officer, as did many another. Do you term them all renegades?"

"No. I took Kemper's parole as if he had been leading white troops against us. He violated it and pillaged in Kentucky. At my solicitation, Patrick Henry and General Washington so represented the matter to the British, demanding that Kemper be dismissed from the army or that ten paroled colonial officers be given a return of their word of honor and permitted to resume arms against England. The British cashiered Kemper out of the army and he joined the savages from choice. He likes nothing better than to rip off the scalps of settlers that fall by his hand. Naturally he bears me no love."

Lucia Harper, still sick at heart from the savage scene that she had witnessed a few hours before, and with Buckner's cool assertion that he would some day open the throats of Kemper and Benoit with his knife, gazed at him in an effort to fathom his nature.

She had had no experience with the men of the border, implacably iron-hard in spirit as they were tireless of body.

"I hear that you have done some scalping yourself," she said.

He looked down at her without smiling, endeavoring to divine the motive back of her words.

"Many scalps I have lifted," he said. "But I have always felt a repugance against stripping the hair from a white man. British I have killed, but have yet the first one to scalp. I would gladly shoot Kemper's black heart out or bury my knife in his throat. But I'd leave him there for the wolves with his hair still on his head."

"I can't see that one is not as bloody and repulsive as the other," she said.

"Then I cannot make you see it," he said. "My ways and views displease you." He was turning away to put an end to the discussion when she detained him with a hand on his arm.

"It is only because of my interest in you, Rodney," she said, "that I try to temper some of your hardness."

He had no way of knowing that it was his primitive male hardness and strength that appealed to the spark of the primitive female buried deep beneath the civilized layers of the woman before him. But he did know that the civilized nature of her would never be content to do aught but strive to make him over into a male pattern of her civilized self. It was the way of all sheltered women to weaken the fibre

of the male by demands that made him ever more pliable to their wishes until he was ruled by their softness. His thoughts leaped back to White Fawn, who would love him unto death as he stood, without trying to change him. A primitive woman loved a man for what he was, a civilized woman for what changes she could make in him. And he caught a look in the eyes that were upturned to his own that warned him that this woman, too, desired him. All the wild, fierce unrestraint under which his life had been spent rose in instant rebellion against the silken tendrils with which she would fetter him. For a second his spirit writhed as a fierce warrior hornet might writhe upon finding itself enmeshed in the invisible web of a spider—and as fiercely he freed himself of it.

Excusing himself, he dropped back to the first cattle boat in a skiff and sent Gilpin up to take charge of the leading boat. His impatience to end this journey and return for White Fawn increased, as he stood gazing at the black line of the wilderness shore during the night.

Eventually two buckskin-clad figures put off in a canoe from the Kentucky shore. Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton, the first and second citizens in importance in Kentucky, boarded the leading boat at the point formerly agreed upon with Buckner. They were to aid in locating the new colony.

"No better land anywhar than that choosed by Rod," Boone told the elder Buckner. "It'll make you as fine an estate as ever Great Oaks did."

"Better, I say," affirmed Kenton, a Virginian himself. "Kentucky is the cream of the world, with wild honey throwed in for good measure."

This pair, the heroes of every settler in the whole of Kentucky, accompanied the boats to where a landing was effected at a point farther west than any present settlement. The household effects of the Buckners were loaded into the wagons, a score of horses packed with surplus equipment. Boone, Kenton and Buckner led the way, followed by the wagons, upon which rode the women and children of the settlers, then by the live stock herded by mounted men, with a body of settlers and woodsmen bringing up the rear. The leaders headed toward the interior valley chosen by Buckner as the site of the colony.

They traveled through virgin wilderness, the forested stretches giving way on occasion to open meadowlands carpeted knee-deep with grass and clover. Game abounded on every side. All were elated at having reached the land of their hopes to find those hopes doubly realized. The best of Virginia could be no fairer than this new region.

Here and there a tree was cut to afford wagon space where the young growth was thick. A few fords were negotiated with difficulty, but in the main the route afforded fair travel for wagons. Just before nightfall, Boone and Buckner went ahead and shot two buffaloes near the point where the overnight camp was to be made. One of the settlers killed an elk, another two deer. One of two trusted slaves, armed in case of possible attack by the savages,

strayed a few yards into the timber, fired his rifle and returned, holding a fat turkey, his teeth flashing in a white grin from the ebony black of his face.

"Dis hyar's a fine lan' we all have come to, Marse Buckner," he declared. "She's jus' lak Va'ginny."

Round noon of the third day they came out upon a low wooded ridge and a wide bottom land opened out before them. Here Buckner had laid out the boundaries of the five thousand acres to be covered by his uncle's warrants. A sparkling creek traversed the property, which extended from ridge to ridge across the wide valley, including a generous slice of the great meadow. Buckner led his uncle and the two ladies to a point of timber that thrust its nose out into the grasslands. The timbered ground was slightly higher and the creek curled round it. The trees were mighty oaks, some of them centuries old.

"Great Oaks the Second," Buckner said.

The elder man could not answer for the lump in his throat, but he took Buckner's hand in a grip that spoke volumes.

"Some of the finest land in all Kentucky," Boone declared.

Already the horses and cattle were grazing eagerly in one of the finest stretches of pasture land in the world.

"Truly, it is the land of milk and honey, as all Kentuckians have claimed," Colonel Buckner said, controlling his voice at last. "The new Virginia! I hereby dedicate myself to the new Virginia in the

future as I have been loyal to old Virginia in the past."

After the custom of the times, he called upon all present to bare their heads and give thanks to the Almighty for having blessed this fair region and led them to it.

Boone and Kenton, the two rugged woodsmen, warmed with pride at this unstinted praise of the country they had fathered. Long before the first cabin had been erected in the broad expanse of Kentucky, both of these men had roamed its fields and forests, hunting the wild beasts and in turn being hunted as wild beasts by the savages whose ancestral lands they had invaded. Each had known a hundred sanguinary encounters with the red men. Each had been captured by savages; and once Boone had been shaved and adopted by them, so great was their admiration for this chief of the fighting woodsmen. Six times Kenton had been put to the ordeal of running the gauntlet in Indian towns of the Ohio wilderness. Once he had been stripped and lashed to the back of a wild horse which then had been chased through the brush for two days by the Indians. Twice he had been condemned to the stake. On the first occasion, Simon Girty, the white Indian, an adopted Wyandotte and the dreaded scourge of the border, had returned to the Indian town of Wappatomica with seven captive women and children and seven fresh scalps. He had pointed to this evidence that for years his hands had been red with settlers' blood in order to strengthen his plea that Kenton was

too great a man to die at the stake. Reprieved, again condemned to die later in another Indian town, the great Mingo chief Logan, whose family had been slain treacherously by Daniel Greathouse and his men, had exerted his prestige and eloquence to save Kenton. A British trader had once ransomed him. On each occasion, both Boone and Kenton had returned to lead the woodsmen of Kentucky against the savages and to locate new settlers on its fertile lands. Their work was by no means ended but already they had devoted their very souls to it for so long that when men gave praise to Kentucky it warmed their hearts as if some one had lavished praise upon some favorite child.

The settlers and the four remaining young Virginians drew lots for choice of locating upon smaller tracts of adjacent lands. Some were to take land by warrant, some purchase, most of them by filing Tomahawk Rights.

Buckner pointed out a crystal spring which he had chosen as the site of the first building to be erected. This was to be a large blockhouse with the walled-in spring within one corner of it. When finished, the Buckners were to take up quarters in it during the completion of the stockade wall, with a smaller blockhouse at each corner, which would enclose a tract of meadowland a hundred yards each way with the spring rill running through it. All hands were to headquarter within those walls thereafter until each settler could erect his individual buildings upon his own land.

That night they sat round blazing fires and roasted buffalo and elk meat while some of the woodsmen, with native caution, prowled the adjacent wilderness to guard against possible surprise attacks. At dawn the next morning a sound never before heard in that region shattered the primeval silence—the ringing strokes of many axes and the crash of falling trees, the voices of settlers and black men lifted in command to horses and plodding oxen, as they dragged the logs to the blockhouse site.

On the evening of the fourth day three wild figures rode up to the encampment. Two of them, upon dismounting, threw aside blankets and coonskin caps to stand forth in the sunshine clad only in breechclout, leggings and moccasins, their heads shaven except for scalp locks. They were Vrain and Curtis, two of Buckner's former rangers. The third was General George Rogers Clark, another far-famed Kentuckian, the hero of the conquest of Illinois, whose name had been upon the lips of every military commander in the world. That the United States Government had been unable to send reinforcements, supplies or even powder and ball to retain the conquered territory, thus necessitating its abandonment, detracted not a bit from the brilliance of Clark's almost incredible achievement. He had accomplished with a band of a few hundred woodsmen what was to require another fifteen years, many disastrous campaigns with resulting losses treble the number of Clark's entire command, a gradual consolidation of the country and a final campaign of an army of five thousand

men to reconquer only partially, since he had been forced to abandon the land after his conquest. It was destined to be thirty years after its abandonment by Clark before Tippecanoe Harrison would defeat the combined forces of the British and the great war chief Tecumseh and reclaim all of Illinois.

Clark was but little older than Buckner, but already the mark of dawning melancholy had descended upon the spirit of this great border general as he foresaw the undoing of his master stroke: the same melancholy that marked the greater Indian chieftains as they also foresaw that what Clark had accomplished in the past would be reaccomplished in the not distant future, and with irrevocable thoroughness.

Something of this same mild depression of spirit descended upon Buckner as he surveyed the busy scene. He had viewed this loveliest of all valleys first when the feet of no white man, not even those of Boone and Kenton, had left their tracks upon it. He had visited it once long ago, when out with a hunting party of Shawnees. Kill-cat and Gray Wolf had told him that not even an Indian lodge would be erected there, as these lands had been reserved for the mutual hunting grounds of the Cherokees of the South and the allied tribes of the Ohio. It was true that no Indian lodge had been erected there; but now more than a score of land filings had been made and within the month a fort and two dozen cabins would mark its loveliness as the site of a flourishing and growing settlement. The next man who came, red or white,

would not be free to roam at will and bivouac of nights, wherever fancy dictated. Within a few short years the buffalo, the elk, the bear, the deer and the turkey, roaming here now in unbelievable abundance, would be but a memory, having been shot down to provide meat and hides for the toiling settlers. That prospect, inspiring those of the working throng to happy laughter and rough badinage as they visualized the peaceful civilization of the near future, somehow failed to bring joy to the heart of Buckner. Instead, he was looking back upon the past, reviewing the scene as he had first looked upon it in company with Kill-cat, Gray Wolf and others of the Shawnee hunting party. He stood there with Boone, Kenton and Clark, each man silent and occupied with his own thoughts as he surveyed the joyous scene.

A man with a long rifle stepped from the timber's edge a musket shot away and peered about him. Then he signalled to those behind him and a dozen cows and horses, each packed with some sort of equipment, were herded from the forest into the open meadow by several half-wild children. A tall, rangy pioneer woman brought up the rear, an ax in one hand, a baby strapped papoose fashion upon her back. This settler family had braved the Ohio alone on a self-constructed flatboat, then had picked up the trail of the Buckner party with the intent to take up land and so avail themselves of the protection of the neighboring colony. Aside from the few cows and horses, they had what they wore upon their backs, a rifle, an ax, two tomahawks, a small supply of powder

and lead, a bullet mold, a very few cooking utensils, a few quilts and a number of skins to serve as bedding —and a vast amount of courage and high optimism.

"Who is chief yere?" the man demanded, striding to the unfinished blockhouse.

"I am," Colonel Buckner stated.

"We aim to settle. I'd like to bargain for a pair of pigs, come yore next litters," he said, "and maybe three-four young hens and a cock. Mine died on the way. I'll work it out, many days as you think right, before I start my own work. What say?"

"Certainly," Colonel Buckner agreed. "It will be some little time before I can let you have them. But I'll have another flatboat load of live stock, poultry and furniture coming down river as soon as we are prepared for them."

"Whenever you can spare 'em," the man acquiesced. He turned to the woman. "Make camp," he instructed. He handed the rifle to a tousle-headed lad of twelve. "Go git some meat," he ordered. Then, to Colonel Buckner, "I'll need a half-day off tomorrow, I reckon, to select and tomahawk out my land."

The colonel nodded agreement. The woman and children were preparing to construct a shelter of poles and bark some distance away in the timber. The man picked up his ax and peeled off his jacket.

"Is thar a lick hereabouts?" he asked.

"I understand there is, a few miles down the creek," the colonel said.

"I'd like to bargain later to make salt for you,

in swap for a pair of ducks whenever you can spare 'em—or the woman could bile down some sugar for yo'all. Thar's a fine maple orchard a piece north into the Injun country and we figure to slip up thar and draw off sap sometime. The kids set a heap o' store by maple b'ilings. The woman's a great hand to make soap too. We got everything we need, except we're a mite shy on stock and poultry."

"We will arrange it some way so that you get a start in pigs and poultry. Sheep too, later," the colonel promised.

The man slapped his thigh with a resounding pop in token of his satisfaction, shouldered his ax and strode off to join the loggers in the forest.

"All hell can't hold back such frontier settlers as that man from pushing on into the wilderness to take up land," Clark said. "It takes border men to conquer each strip of wilderness and prepare the way—men of that fellow's type to settle it up later and hang on with the tenacity of a bulldog. You, Boone and Kenton, may well be proud to have led the borderers into Kentucky, to claim it for the settlers that are following to make homes. I led the borderers into Illinois but lost it again, and it will be after my day when settlers make their homes there as they do now in Kentucky."

Buckner, too, knew a lofty pride in this new race of men who were advancing the far frontiers of a new nation—such as that family that had just arrived to hew out a home despite all obstacles. He felt a warm satisfaction at knowing that the man and

woman had attained their hearts' desire at last—a piece of land on which they could take root and call it home; to which they could point and say, "That is ours. We won it from the wilderness."

But while he experienced warm sympathy for such desires in others, the urge to secure land and remain upon it permanently himself seemed atrophied. His was a detached interest, selfless in so far as gaining land for himself was concerned. Instead his interest had been broader—the desire to conquer much land for his people as a whole rather than to conquer a small section of it for himself alone.

"It must be the Injun in me," he reflected. "The redskin chief goes to war to take territory from neighboring tribes and conquer it for the use of his people as a whole, not to claim a lodge site of his own."

Clark stood peering off to the west, and spoke as if prophetically.

"We four are border men, the advance guards of civilization. For so long as there is a frontier, there will be the border fringe of woodsmen far beyond it, while the settlers follow along behind. For so long as there is a frontier, there will be need for men of our breed. But when the civilization for which we have fought overtakes us, we find ourselves out of step with it."

Colonel Buckner hastened up to the four men. The arrival of the settler family had recalled a matter which, in the general activity, had slipped his mind.

"If settlers keep arriving, which it is to be hoped

they will, all the land of the valley and for miles beyond it will be taken," he said. "And you have not made your selection yet."

Before Buckner could reply, Gilpin, the two Hernes, Vrain and Curtis joined the group.

"You men are going to take up land with us, of course?" the colonel inquired of the five woodsmen.

"Not right off, Cunnel, speaking for myself," Gilpin said.

"We got right smart of prowling to do before settling at one spot," one of the Hernes declared.

Vrain and Curtis also seemed indisposed to take up permanent residence at that time. The latter two, however, closed a deal with the colonel on the spot. They agreed to remain and hunt meat for the Buckner household and retainers and to scout for Indian sign in case any marauding war parties penetrated the neighborhood. For this service they were to receive five dollars a month each in gold or thirteen dollars a month in supplies, as they chose, powder and lead to be furnished free.

This arrangement concluded, the colonel turned to his nephew.

"You have warrants for a thousand acres for services in the Revolution," he said. "When will you make your selection?"

Buckner looked out across the lovely valley.

"Right to-day," he said at last. "To-morrow I start back up the Ohio with Gilpin and the Hernes. Captain Farris may be ransomed from the Indians by the British. It's a good chance that he will be.

They offer a big price in rum for condemned captives. But by the time he'd get back, the land hereabouts would all be filed on. If he returns inside a year, give him the land I take by warrant to-day. If he hasn't showed up by then, give it to Lucia Harper. When I come this way again, I will sign the necessary papers."

"But you!" his uncle exclaimed. "What will you do for land?"

"I don't need warrants to get what land I'll want," Buckner said. "Whenever I am ready to live on one piece of land I can take Tomahawk Rights to whatever piece strikes my fancy."

That decision, though he himself was not then aware of it, marked him irrevocably as a member of that border fringe of which General Clark just now had spoken so prophetically.

CHAPTER XII

At intervals throughout the night, Buckner lifted his head from the ground to listen. On each such occasion, he recalled that he was fifty miles back from the frontier and in no danger of attack from savages. Such precautions, however, were part of his very nature. The least unusual sound, no matter how slight, waked him on the instant. His three companions slept soddenly. They were three militiamen returning to their settlements far removed from the border.

The panic on the frontier had communicated itself to the quieter settlements far behind it. Small parties of savages, traveling in twos and threes, had been slipping past the closely guarded and ever-alert frontier settlements and pressing far to the rear where the farmers had no thought of danger. There they would collect a few easy scalps by shooting down field hands from ambush, capture a child or two as they crossed through woodlots or along country lanes, steal a few head of horses and return with all haste to the Indian country.

There were no woodsmen in such communities to read the signs left by the marauders and discover that it was the work of but two or three braves. Such a foray never failed to throw the quiet community in which it occurred into a panic for months.

Many viewed the depredations as retaliatory measures on the part of the savages by way of reprisal for the implacable hostility of the frontier settlers against all Indians. Forgetting the days of long ago, when their own communities had been on the frontier and their own settlers had committed every variety of outrage against the Indians despite the protest of quieter communities farther east, they now demanded that the present frontier settlers treat the redskins as human beings. Others believed that the defenses of the frontier were weakening. Quiet communities, long immune to savage depredations, decided to organize volunteer militia to be called together for local defence in case the savages broke through and invaded such neighborhoods. Meanwhile the clamor against the frontier practice of slaying any and all Indians was kept up. Major Donner had been selected by Crenshaw Bottom to organize and train a body of some fifty men who could be summoned to leave work and defend the community if danger should threaten.

It was for Crenshaw Bottom that Buckner now headed, to take White Fawn back with him to Kentucky. Two hours before dawn, he lifted his head again to listen. The moon was still high and shed its white radiance over the landscape. Reason told him that nothing could be wrong here so far behind the frontier. But he could not shake off the feeling that he had been roused by some unusual sound. Suddenly he realized that it was not an unusual sound that had roused him but the lack of a usual one. When he

had freed his horse for the night, along with those of his companions, he had put the usual small bell on its neck in case the animal, after satisfying its hunger, should head back toward its home range on the frontier. Throughout the night its slow, occasional tinkle had conveyed to him, even when sleeping, the information that the animal was moving round aimlessly as if feeding. He had not heard the bell since waking. Had the horse headed back toward the Ohio and moved off beyond earshot before Buckner had waked? He doubted it. The steadily diminishing sound of it into the west would have penetrated his consciousness even as he slept and roused him.

Buckner threw off his blanket and rose. He stripped the waterproof deer-gut covering from his gunlock and looked carefully to the priming, another invariable custom of his.

"Where you going?" one of his companions inquired, lifting his head.

"Horses seem to have strayed," Buckner said. "I'll have a look around for them."

"I'll go with you," the man volunteered. He set off through the moonlight without so much as picking up his gun.

The two men moved out across the dew-drenched valley, the misty drops glistening silver-white on the grass. The meadow was dotted with patches of brush. The horses had not been gone long. Dark streaks where their feet had scuffed the dew from the grass were as clearly discernible to Buckner's practiced eyes under the white moonlight as the trail of a buck in the

snow at high noon would have been to the eyes of most men.

Buckner halted suddenly. A darkening of the dew-bespangled grass showed on the west.

"Wait," he said to his companion, and advanced to investigate.

"They haven't strayed. They've been lifted," he announced presently.

"Stole!" his companion exclaimed incredulously. "Who by?"

"Savages, likely," Buckner said. "Probably a pair of them on one of those little forays that have been upsetting the settlements behind the frontiers. Two men came across the grass from the west." He moved swiftly along on the trail of the horses. "They bunched them here. See where they milled round in this one little patch? The savages mounted two and led the others. The trail runs in a straightaway from here. I'll be off after them."

All that was so apparent to Buckner was a sheer blank to the militiaman.

"We'll make sure in the morning," he suggested.

"I've made sure now," Buckner returned.

He started off at a swinging trot on that dark swathe in the dew-spangled grass. Not until the trail led up through the choppy timbered hills did he find a place where he could not follow it at a run. Even in the timber, the four sets of hooves had cut so deeply into the leaf mold and trampled down so many nettles and other such vegetation that he could follow it at a fast walk. Two hours later, in the first

rays of dawn, he had covered some seven miles. The thieves were heading straight west toward the Ohio and had something over forty miles yet to go. He was certain that they would not travel the entire distance and try to swim their stolen mounts across the river to the Indian side by daylight for fear of running foul of prowling woodsmen or settlers. Somewhere short of the Ohio, they would stop until nightfall before attempting a crossing, in which case he could overhaul them with ease.

The trail revealed the fact that the horses had been pressed to a good gait wherever the going was feasible. Mile after mile, Buckner held on without slackening his pace. The way led across rough ranges of hills and dipped into valleys, always veering to avoid the vicinity of settlers' cabins. He covered another fifteen miles without any certainty that he was gaining much on the thieves. Then the trail grew fresher and at last he came to indisputable evidence that the horses were but a few minutes ahead of him. The low ridge on which he stood descended almost imperceptibly to merge into a wide timbered flat. He was on the point of putting on a fresh burst of speed in an effort to overhaul the animals when he stopped short as the faint tinkle of a horse bell reached his ears from out in that timbered flat. Instantly he took cover behind a tree and surveyed the forest ahead and on either flank.

Unquestionably the bell had been removed from the horse before it had been ridden away. Now it had

been restored to the horse's neck. Several times the faint tinkle rose from the same spot a quarter of a mile ahead. The thieves had made a halt—and that bell had been restored for but one purpose. It was a favorite trick of savages to leave stolen horses grazing at some strategic point so in case the owner had managed to work out the trail, he would see them feeding quietly and believe that they had traveled there of their own volition. Countless settlers, hastening forward to gather their missing stock, had lost their lives to savages who were lying in wait for them. It was a familiar and transparent ruse to Buckner.

He turned at right angles and moved some three hundred yards through the forest, then turned again to parallel the trail. Occasionally he stopped to listen for the horse bell. Presently it informed him that he was abreast of the horses. He held on for a distance, then angled over until the tinkle of the bell indicated that he was some two hundred yards beyond the horses, in the direction opposite to that from which they had come.

Yard by yard, slowly and with exceeding caution, he moved toward them, taking advantage of every bit of cover. He glided face down from one windfall log to another or along the course of little depressions in the surface. At each point so attained, with a spray of leaves held before his face, he elevated both the spray and his head an inch at a time until his eyes cleared the obstruction behind which he lay and enabled him to study the landscape before him.

There being only two Indians, it was highly probable that instead of waiting in ambush near the horses they would conceal themselves on the flank of their back track. Then, if following settlers appeared on the trail, the savages could attack if the pursuers were but few, or could slip away and abandon the stolen horses if a large party arrived. Buckner discovered the animals feeding in a slight depression, the bottom of a shallow, grassy swale. Somewhere beyond them, two alert savages were watching their back track. But on which side of the trail were they stationed? Upon divining that all-important point depended the advantage of coming upon them from behind or the disadvantage of approaching in the face of watchful eyes. The cover seemed equal on either flank.

Buckner watched the horses. Whenever they lifted their heads he observed the direction of their gaze and the action of their sensitive ears. Several times they looked in his direction, their ears pricked forward, as if aware of his presence. Their attention turned most frequently, however, to the northeast, as if something in that direction challenged their casual attention. That would mean that the warriors were stationed on the north side of the back track. Acting on this assumption, Buckner began his stalk, circling to get in the rear of his quarry.

Then, with the patience of a hunting cat, he worked toward the point where he hoped to find them. At the end of an hour of maneuvering, he located them, prone behind a down log which com-

manded the trail made by the horses on the way in. Foot by foot, he made his way to within fifty yards of the two braves. Rising to stand behind a huge tree, he examined the priming pan of his piece, then thrust it past the tree, preparatory to drawing a bead on one of the unsuspecting braves. At that instant a red squirrel, racing down the tree, discovered him at the foot of it and scurried aloft with a startled bark, followed by an insistent chirring rasp of anger.

At the first startled note, the eyes of the warriors were drawn to the spot. Each saw the movement of the rifle as Buckner thrust it from behind the tree. With incredible swiftness, they leaped the down log and dropped flat upon its far side, then glided to station themselves behind trees. The war whoop rose defiantly from two throats.

Buckner silently cursed the squirrel that had reversed the odds at the final instant of his long and tedious stalk. He exposed one eye for a split second to survey the forest head, then withdrew it. Most of the savages of the Ohio were excellent marksmen and could plant a ball in the exposed half of a man's head at forty yards if given but a brace of seconds in which to draw a bead. He knew that two muskets were trained upon his tree. Again he peered forth, this time upon the left side of the trunk, withdrawing his head as quickly as before. That time he located a rifle barrel with the peering eye of a warrior behind it. Dropping to one knee, he took another flashing survey. At intervals varying from five to fifteen seconds he exposed one eye or the other, never

twice from the same point so that the waiting savages would be unable to determine at just what second or at what point that elusive eye was to appear. Buckner failed to locate the stand of the second savage. It was almost certain that one of them would draw off to circle around beyond musket range and come in behind him. When the remaining brave lifted his voice to engage Buckner in conversation, the woodsman knew that his apprehension was about to be realized. It was an old ruse of the redskins for one to engage a concealed enemy in conversation while another maneuvered to outflank him.

"Why you steal Injun hoss?" the savage called out. "Me no steal. Injun man only take his own back. That Wyandotte hoss. Me take now."

It was true that Buckner's mount had once belonged to the Wyandottes. Stealing horses from the whites was a regular occupation with the Indians of the Ohio wilderness. Reckless young borderers had grouped together to wage similar raids against the Indians, sometimes slipping into the very Indian towns at night and departing with the mounts of the redskins. It was a custom sanctioned by the entire frontier and Buckner's steed was one of the animals obtained in this fashion.

"That white man's hoss," Buckner called back. "You plenty big thief."

He must draw the fire of the redskin in front, then rush him before he could reload—and that very quickly, for the one who was circling would be in a position to shoot in the back before many minutes.

Many a woodsman had drawn the fire of a concealed savage by exposing his coonskin cap, then rushed him with the ferocity of a panther before he could reload, but the ruse was now known to the redskins and they were seldom deluded by it. A huge, whitish slab of lichen that grew from the base of the moldy trunk gave Buckner the inspiration to attempt a variation of the trick. Tearing it from the tree, he sized it up swiftly, placed his coonskin cap on top of it, then gouged with his thumb nail a dark spot to correspond with the human eye.

As he worked, he answered the conversation of the remaining savage, but his eyes roved to the rear and to either flank for a glimpse of the one who was circling. He detected movement far behind him to the left. He worked his rifle barrel along the ground on the right side of the tree as if it were being thrust forward by a man prone on the ground, who hoped that it would avoid detection. Then, very slowly, he allowed the rounded edge of the lichen, topped by the coonskin cap, to slide into the view of the warrior as if it were the half of a man's face peering along the barrel of the rifle that rested on the ground. Even as he performed this maneuver, his eyes were concerned with the landscape behind him. A dark shape flitted from tree to tree a hundred yards to the rear. Already the savage was within range. A few more yards and he would draw a bead on the crouching woodsman. If the lichen failed to draw the fire of the remaining savage in two seconds, Buckner decided, he would dart forth and

make a running fight of it. Even as his muscles tensed for the leap from cover, the forest was rocked by an explosion and the lichen was torn from his fingers as the warrior in front sent a ball through it. On the instant, jerking his rifle back to a position that covered the rear, Buckner sprawled prone on the ground with a portion of his body exposed to the view of the savage who had fired. The warrior, peering beneath the smoke of his musket shot, gave voice to a fierce yell of triumph. The brave who had circled to the rear peered from behind a tree seventy yards away, then stepped into view, only to go down with a wild screech as Buckner sent a heavy ball through his chest.

Springing to his feet, the woodsman leaped upon the startled warrior who was advancing to scalp his supposed victim. The powerful savage met him toe to toe and lunged so viciously with his knife that Buckner, to avoid being ripped open by the murderous blade, sprang aside and the blow of his tomahawk fell short. With the speed of a striking snake, the savage knocked it from his hand with a single sweep of a brawny left arm. Buckner transferred his own heavy knife from his left hand to his right as he leaped back, then jumped in again. The two came to grips, each with a left hand gripping the right wrist of his adversary, endeavoring thus to hold the knife hand of his opponent while freeing his own.

Back, shoulder and arm muscles bulged with the strain, thighs and calves were braced to high tension as the powerful pair fought through the forest after

the fashion of two heaving buck deer with their horns locked in a death grip. The struggling pair tore up the soft leaf mold with toes that sought for a firm foothold to brace against the onset of the foe, caromed against trees and twice fell to the earth, only to rise in that same lock, the hold of neither of them broken. Few men were Buckner's equal in strength and endurance, but this powerful Wyandotte was a match for him.

At the end of ten minutes of continual straining, the savage showed not the least symptom of fatigue. His eyes glared into those of the woodsman with unquenchable hatred. Buckner then resorted to passive defense. His left hand gripped the right wrist of the Wyandotte with unyielding power to prevent the use of the savage's knife, but he ceased straining to free his own right wrist from the vise-like grip of the Indian's left hand. After the space of a minute, the savage's eyes gleamed with vindictive triumph as he sensed the weakening struggles of that right arm to be free. He increased his efforts to twist his knife arm from the white man's steel fingers. At last Buckner's left arm, too, seemed to weaken slightly and the Wyandotte heaved with every ounce of his power to bend it back and press the point of his knife home in the body of his foe. While he concentrated on that effort, insensibly the muscles of the savage's left arm had relaxed to meet only the strain put upon them by Buckner's right, which for the past ten minutes had been but little.

Those muscles, relaxed from lack of resistance

against which to exert their power, were unable to tense with sufficient swiftness when Buckner's right arm, so long apparently strengthless, whipped sidewise and down with the sudden energy of a steel spring and broke the Wyandotte's grip. Only then did the warrior comprehend the caliber of his foe —a man who could remain cool and calculatingly patient for many minutes during the heat of a desperate struggle. He knew then that he had been tricked.

Still clamping the Indian's knife wrist with his left hand, Buckner's right held his own knife low and to the rear of his right thigh where the savage, who lunged to regain his grip, could not reach it. With the deadliness of a striking snake, Buckner's knife leaped up to the Wyandotte's left side as the savage sought to encircle his opponent with his huge left arm. Again the knife was whipped up. Only when the warrior's frame had become limp and sagged to the ground did Buckner's grip on his opponent's wrist relax.

Buckner was both hungry and sleepy. Reloading his rifle, he shot a squirrel and roasted it over a fire, then slept, to wake hours later to the sound of distant voices. The three militiamen, in company with a settler, had managed to work out the trail left by the four horses.

The quartette observed the two fresh scalps at Buckner's belt and made eager inquiry as to the fight. He recounted the details of it, mentioning incidentally the efforts of the Wyandotte to engage

him in an argument as to the ownership of Buckner's horse while the other brave circled to outflank him. The men viewed the remains of the two slain braves and the settler announced their identity. They were two friendly Indians who had come to the settlements far behind the frontier on several occasions of late, he said.

"No doubt they have been responsible, along with a few companions, for most of the minor outrages behind the frontier that have so upset the settlements during the past few months," Buckner declared and dismissed the matter from his mind.

He returned with the settler and the militiamen to their former overnight camp from which the horses had been stolen, arriving late at night. In the morning he started on to cover the remaining fifty miles to Crenshaw Bottom. It was late when he reached his destination and he bivouacked outside the settlement for the night.

In the morning he repaired to Lander's farm, a mile outside the village. Mrs. Lander's horrified gaze fastened on the two scalps at his belt and her eyes rolled heavenward. Shrilly she gave him a tongue-lashing as to his heathenish ways. He listened to this tirade for a while in stoical indifference, then silenced the woman with an imperious gesture as he repeated his original question.

"Where is White Fawn?"

"She works in the field with the others," the woman said sullenly. "Where else would she be at this time of day?"

Buckner turned from her and strode toward a distant group in the field. He had covered but a fraction of the distance when a figure detached itself and raced toward him. White Fawn cast herself into his arms and for the first time he tasted the sweetness of the lips she held up to him. For a long minute he held them with the ardor of the starving.

"Come, White Fawn," he said then. "We return to Kentucky."

There was great content in her eyes as she paced by his side toward the Lander farmhouse.

"You were long in coming," she said. "In a short while I would have returned to the Shawnees to wait for you there. I like not these Long-knives of Crenshaw. The three who came with you to the Shawnee country were different. Laughter came readily to their lips. Those of Crenshaw seldom smile. The three men had kindness. These speak of goodness, but of kindness they know not. Do the Long-knives, then, believe that laughter is sin, and to be kind is a weakness?"

"There are many tribes of Indians in the Ohio," said Buckner. "It is so with the Long-knives. These of Crenshaw take pleasure in being a joyless people. The butterfly spreads its lovely wings to the sunlight in the joy of living, while the cheerless slug hides the mold, each deeming his own mode of life best. White Fawn is a butterfly. The people of Crenshaw are slugs. I should not have left you with them, but I did not then know how bad it would be or how long I was to be before my return. But

we leave them now for the sunlit woods of Kentucky."

They rounded the corner of the house and a dozen men pounced upon Buckner and bore him down by sheer weight of numbers. Even as they seized him he struck out with hands and feet. A sweep of his arm sent one man crashing against the log walls. As he went down on his back and men fell forward upon him, he lifted one foot to an assailant's middle and propelled him into the air with a powerful thrust. The man came down on his head and collapsed in a senseless heap on the ground. Buckner's hand sought his knife but some assailant had plucked it from his belt. Even his heaving strength was insufficient to shake off his antagonists. Two men to each arm, they bent his wrists behind his back and pinioned them with rawhide while others held his body and legs. He was jerked to his feet and found himself confronting Major Donner.

"What is the meaning of this?" Buckner demanded.

"You are the prisoner of the State of Pennsylvania—held to answer for the murder of two friendly Indians," Donner informed. "You will be detained until the authorities send for you."

Buckner knew then the nature of the thing that had befallen him. The East, stirred by the villainous murder of the harmless Delawares on the Muskingum two years before, had risen to demand that the propensities of the frontier settlers for bloodshed be curbed and all offenders punished. Such sentiment was not new. As early as Dunmore's time, that colo-

nial governor of Pennsylvania had been forced to offer large rewards for the capture of various white men who had been guilty of murdering peaceful redskins. The frontier, standing back of its own, had steadfastly refused to give up the offenders. Several for whom such rewards had been offered were popular heroes of the border. In response to the pressure brought by the thickly settled communities well removed from the scene of savage depredations, various State governments had been forced to sanction the imprisonment by militia officers of all settlers who killed friendly Indians. The frontier was highly incensed at this new bit of interference.

"So you think the two redskins whose scalps I took were friendly?" Buckner inquired.

"That is what the settlers of that community claim," Donner stated. "They are greatly alarmed lest the Wyandottes retaliate by invading the vicinity in force."

"The groundless fears of old women," Buckner retorted.

"After all," Donner said, "the horse you rode had been stolen from the Wyandottes, as you related yourself. You also admitted that one Indian called out that he was no thief but was merely taking his own back. No doubt he believed it was simple justice and he intended no bloodshed."

"No bloodshed?" Buckner scoffed. "Then why did they resort to the old redskin ruse of leaving the horses peacefully grazing as decoys while they lay in ambush on their back track?"

"That is not for me to answer. But you might have discussed the matter instead of taking their lives," Donner said.

"Discuss?" Buckner echoed incredulously. "After they had gobbled the war whoop at first glimpse of me? Does one temporize playfully with a copperhead after its head is lifted to strike?"

"What bearing has that?" Donner demanded.

"When a warrior gobbles at you it means that he has declared his intention—which is to lift your hair if he can. It never did and never will mean anything but just that in redskin parlance," Buckner explained.

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, in your case, I should have attempted to settle the matter in some way," Donner stated.

"No doubt you would," Buckner agreed grimly.

He knew that this fiasco might have serious results. Donner was a power in this part of Pennsylvania and he had small love for Buckner. The prisoner was a Virginian and the bitterness over boundary disputes would not aid his case with Pennsylvanians. Donner, he could see, was prepared to put the worst construction upon his possession of a Wyandotte horse and the apparently peaceful arguments which, according to Buckner's own assertions, had been advanced by one of the Wyandotte braves. It was known that the two braves had posed as friendly Indians in various settlements behind the frontier. With the present wave of almost hysterical demands that frontier settlers who killed friendly

Indians should be punished, it was highly probable that the authorities of this part of Pennsylvania would attempt to make an example of Buckner and give him a prison sentence. If he had been taken by the enemy he would have accepted it stoically. But his fierce pride rebelled at being imprisoned by the very people for whom he had fought throughout the long years of the war. He fiercely resented being treated as a criminal by one community for an act which would have been hailed as a public benefaction in an adjacent community.

He surveyed the volunteer militiamen, raised to defend their town from imaginary savages, but who instead had imprisoned him for doing in reality what they accomplished only in fancy. He laughed scornfully.

"Crenshaw Bottom hails the major as its heroic leader for the savages he failed to slay. It regards me as a criminal for succeeding where he failed," he scoffed.

Thirty-odd hours later, as he lounged in the ancient blockhouse of Crenshaw Bottom, Buckner fretted at White Fawn's failure to come to him.

At that very moment, she was a hundred miles away, peering from the edge of the forest at the camp of several settlers' families on the banks of the Ohio. Terrified at the seizure of her man by those of his own race, she had slipped away unobserved and had traveled without a halt. She saw no familiar faces among those in the camp. But several men among them were garbed in buskskin hunting shirts. The

matter was urgent, so she approached the nearest of them.

"Where is Gilpin, the Long-knife of the woods?" she asked.

The settler surveyed her in kindly fashion. "Long-knife of the woods, eh? You've lived among the Injuns, gal, I take it. Gilpin is som'eres within many miles o' hyar, but I can't rightly say jest whar."

"Then where are the Hernes, the brothers of Gray Wolf?" the girl asked.

"You'll find them wharever Gilpin is camped at, I reckon," the man returned. The urgency of the girl's manner impressed him. "You're looking for borderers that you knowed in the Injun towns? They can't be more 'n twenty-thirty miles off from hyar. I've heered folks mention seeing them in the past few days. We kin locate 'em fer you in a day or two, most likely."

"That will be too late!" she said. "I must find Long-knives of the woods who are friends of Buckner," White Fawn declared.

"Now you can sartinly count me a friend of hisn," the settler stated emphatically. "Every man on the border is that." A sudden thought struck him. "You don't mean Buckner's been took by the redskins? Speak up and tell us what's ailing."

The man's face set in a frown as she related her story. When she had finished, he gave vent to a low growl of resentment and strode to the other men who were engaged in constructing flatboats on the banks of the river.

"It's Buckner's woman," she heard him say. "She's come a hundred miles afoot to look for borderers to help him."

The rest of his words were lost but she saw hard, reckless faces light up with wild fury as he proceeded.

"Rest easy, gal," the man said, returning. "We on the border looks after our own."

The men had dropped their tools and each one secured his rifle from the shelter where his own family was domiciled. They scattered swiftly, some going upriver, some downstream. Within the hour, armed men began to come into the camp, singly and in two and threes. Gilpin and the two Hernes arrived in hot haste.

More than a score of border woodsmen congregated there and almost an equal number of frontier settlers. The desperate little band set off at a purposeful trail trot and was lost to view in the forest. Other woodsmen arrived singly as the news spread, made brief inquiry and disappeared in the forest on the trail of those who had gone on ahead.

White Fawn slept many hours out of the next forty-eight. At the end of that period, she saw a sizable body of armed men approaching.

"Milishy," one of the frontier women said.

White Fawn was apprehensive on the instant. The men of Crenshaw Bottom who had taken Buckner had been called militia. Now the borderers had gone on the warpath against Crenshaw Bottom. Militia came here. Were they in search of her for the part

she had played? The difference between various faction of whites was but vaguely known to her. She fled to the river and launched a canoe. Those of the camp called out to her to come back but she did not so much as turn. They watched her make a landing on the Indian side of the Ohio and disappear in the wilderness.

Back in the ancient blockhouse, Buckner scornfully watched the plodding of the volunteer guards in the walled-in compound. A score or more of them were quartered there. Two men stood as guards before the door of the blockhouse. Two others paced useless beats along the wall of the little compound before it. Donner would be military at all costs, no matter how absurd the demonstration, Buckner reflected.

At first Buckner had decided to await the outcome of this affair, hoping that a trial would result in his public exoneration. But of late years all such formalities of civilization had come to be more or less meaningless to him. He was capable of defending his honor most religiously as an individual, of punishing summarily any who should question it to the slightest degree. A public gesture was rather an impersonal matter. The whole frontier would resent the absurdity and injustice of his punishment. The larger centers of civilization understood less than nothing of the ways of the redskins and the necessities of savage warfare, so their united opinion as to his action was valueless in his eyes. Always there had been a profound difference between the views of the older

settled communities and those of the frontier, amounting almost to hostility. Buckner was essentially a creature of action and he now began to chafe against confinement and enforced inactivity with the restlessness of a caged panther. Release from this tedium became the paramount consideration. It should be no difficult matter to escape from it, to invade the Lander premises, release White Fawn from their custody and take to the woods. Once in the clear, it would be impossible for a hundred such militiamen as those outside to recapture himself and White Fawn.

The prophetic words of Clark, the young border general, recurred to Buckner. Clark had said that as soon as the woodsmen had won the frontier for civilization it would no longer be the frontier; and that there would be no place for the frontiersmen in the civilization that their efforts had made possible. Buckner's present plight was an apt illustration of the accuracy of Clark's prophesy.

The light from the fire in the compound, filtering through narrow apertures, was all that relieved the blackness of Buckner's quarters. On the morrow, when there was sufficient light, he would examine the interior of the room for some point of weakness upon which to work during the day so that he might effect his escape the next night and take White Fawn from the Lander farm. With this decision, he fell into an untroubled sleep sometime before midnight, little suspecting that within twenty miles some forty half-wild borderers were streaming through the woods like

a pack of hunting wolves, covering the miles with a space-devouring lope. Behind them, strung out for many miles, other border men were running steadily through the night.

A half-hour before dawn, Buckner waked suddenly, reaching instinctively for his rifle. Then he realized that he was weaponless, imprisoned within four log walls. What had waked him with a sense of impending menace? A dog growled angrily from somewhere outside. An owl hooted twice and was answered by three notes from somewhat farther away. Buckner's spine tingled with the old wariness as he stepped to a narrow aperture and peered forth into the compound. Two sentries patrolled their restricted beats. The others slept around the coals of the fire in the compound. There was more owl conversation. The sentries seemed to pay no heed to it. Dogs made growling rushes in the adjacent town. Still the men around the fire slept on and the sentries stolidly paced their beats. The night was dark but Buckner's straining eyes discerned queer excrescences on the top of the stockade wall. There was a faint cheep, as if voiced by some small bird roused from its slumbers. Two dark figures dropped silently from the wall. There were two muffled thuds and the sentries no longer paced their beats. Then the whole compound swarmed with vague shapes that had scaled the stockade wall and dropped inside with the agility and noiselessness of prowling cats. Strong hands seized the sleepers around the fire. Some woke with startled cries, only to be warned in fierce low tones

to keep silence. Several attempted to put up a fight, and in each instance there came again that muffled thud of a well-wrapped club descending upon a human head. Within a space of two minutes after that bird had cheeped, every one of the score or more of militiamen inside the blockade had been securely tied. The gates were opened and the moving forms disappeared to return with the rifles and equipment which they had been forced to cache outside to facilitate their noiseless scaling of the stockade.

"Whar is your den, Chief?" a voice inquired.

"Here," Buckner answered from his aperture.

Fresh fuel had been added to the fire. The outer bars of the door to Buckner's room were lowered and the door swung open. He stepped outside among his friends. Save for the stockade walls, the picture was a familiar one to him, the one which he loved above all others—a fire round which a score of wild figures were gathered, some of them garbed in buckskins, some naked from the waist up, attired only in moccasins, breechclouts and leggings. The sentries and the others who had been knocked on the head so unceremoniously were reviving, to find themselves securely bound.

"No lives lost," Gilpin said. "They grow skulls so thick hereabouts that cannon shot would scassly dent them—nor a new idea seep in."

The prisoners were warned against raising an alarm.

"If you'd do a favor for your own breed o'cats, it's best not to rouse the townfolk," Gilpin said. "Thar's

twenty-odd more of our kind scattered round the edge of town. They're het up agin such communities as this for their stand on the Injun question. If they was to be fired on, these border wolves would clean up your green sheep of milishy like a pack of weasels in a hen roost, which I'd be sorry to see."

Gray dawn was spreading. The prisoners were confined in Buckner's former quarters while the woodsmen devoured the rations intended for the consumption of the militia. The others had been signalled in and the compound swarmed with them when a sentinel, peering from a loophole, announced that Donner was approaching. The gate was opened to admit him and he gazed wildly around him as he was made a prisoner.

"The authorities will punish this outrage!" he threatened.

"Sure! Sure!" an oldish woman soothed him. "Times change. I hail from these parts myself, when it was on the frontier and the settlers' lands unsafe from the depredations of savages. 'Twas the very settlers from hereabouts that made such an uproar about the East deserting 'em to the savages that they forced Pennsylvania to put a bounty on all Injun scalps. Now, with their lands safe these many years, they've turned smug and virtuous, denying others the right to do now as they done in the past."

"I'm for good treatment of the Injuns and agin further encouragement on the Injun lands myself—after I've got good land safe for me and mine as you hereabouts done before me," a settler declared.

In the gray light of dawn the townsfolk looked forth to see a motley crew of half-savage figures marching past in straggling formation. They stood and watched until the woodsmen had disappeared toward the west.

CHAPTER XIII

The night was black as Buckner neared the Wyandotte town. Upon his return to the camp of the flatboaters on the Ohio to learn that White Fawn had disappeared into the Indian country, he had started at once in pursuit of her. That the Shawnees would welcome her with open arms, he knew. It was Kemper that he feared.

Far to the west, on a stream that flowed to the Wabash, Kemper had established a trading post that was the hang-out of renegade white men. He incited the savages to prey upon the flatboat travel on the Ohio. For such goods as they plundered from the boats he paid a good price in rum. Then he traded the goods to the Western tribes for furs, which in turn he sold to the fur traders of Detroit.

Kemper had offered Tonk-a-naw a very big price for White Fawn even before he had suspected that she had the least interest in Buckner or the slightest intention of leaving the Shawnees. The moment that he heard of her return, he would increase his offer to any price that was necessary. Tonk-a-naw, having once lost out altogether by waiting, would be very apt to close the arrangement with all possible dispatch. In that case, the girl would be very closely watched from the moment of her arrival to make sure that she did not depart again. It might prove

impossible for Buckner to get in touch with her. With that in mind, he felt it imperative to overtake her before she should reach her home town.

It was certain that she would stop in the nearest Indian town on her direct route for food and perhaps linger there to rest. It was for that reason that he headed for the nearest Wyandotte town. As he traveled he was conscious of an increasing dull rage at the interfering militia at Crenshaw and of all such gentry in general for having been responsible for this occurrence.

Mingled apprehension and anger crowded upon Buckner's thoughts as he pressed on through the night. In his anxiety, his usual cool consideration of every possible adverse contingency had been lessened to a considerable extent.

Indian scouts, ever watching along the Ohio, had accosted White Fawn almost at the instant of her landing. They had kept her in their camp for a day and a night. The romance between Buckner and White Fawn was known throughout the Ohio wilderness. These Delaware scouts, with true redskin shrewdness, had divined that Buckner might follow White Fawn. They had escorted her to the nearest Indian town. The savages were well aware of Buckner's boldness. It was known that he had penetrated to the heart of Indian towns at night to eavesdrop upon conversations and so determine the future activities of the tribes and the destination of the war parties. That he would now follow a similarly daring course seemed probable.

So Buckner, his usual vigilance temporarily dulled by anxiety and the pressing necessity of overtaking White Fawn, proceeded along the very lines that the wily red stategists had hoped he would follow. That the outer Indian towns were on the alert for him, he had no idea.

He entered the Wyandotte town boldly. All seemed very quiet. He listened for conversation upon which he could eavesdrop but the lodges were dark and silent, as if all of the occupants had retired for the night. A warrior passed him in the darkness as he made his way toward the center of the town.

"How is it with you, Brother?" the savage inquired.

"Well," Buckner returned in the Wyandotte tongue.

The warrior passed on without halting. Three others passed him or crossed his path, paying no heed to him. Voices rose from a big lodge near the center of the town. He drew near and stood in the outer darkness, his ears strained to catch the text of the conversation. He heard White Fawn's name and held his breath to hear what was said of her. Suddenly a tingle of mingled delight and relief flooded through him as White Fawn's own voice reached him. Instantly, he started upon a retreat. He would withdraw to the forest and give their old signal. As soon as was feasible after hearing it, White Fawn would come to him. Even as he turned to withdraw, his old wariness reasserted itself. Some uncanny sense informed him that this town was too quiet. The lodges

stood black and silent, save for this large central one. Had it been planned to that end—only one spot to which an eavesdropper would naturally gravitate? He felt, rather than reasoned, some sinister significance in the very ease with which his feet had led him to White Fawn—as a fox is left but one inviting lane to the trap. That animal wariness rose from the depths in swift warning that all was not well—but it arrived one second too late. He turned to retreat but iron hands clamped his ankles and jerked him off balance as dark forms sprang upon him and bore him to the ground. Securely bound, he was dragged to the council house. A fire was kindled and he found himself hemmed in by fierce and hostile faces. Throughout the balance of the night a council deliberated upon his case without arriving at a definite conclusion. There was no doubt as to his fate, but merely as to the manner of his death. The Wyandottes had outlawed the custom of torturing captives at the stake and refused to accede to the demand of the few Lake Delawares that the prisoner be dispatched in that manner. The Lake Delawares were equally adamant.

"The prisoner belongs to the Delawares of the lakes," one brave asserted. "It was to our camp of Delaware scouts that White Fawn came. I myself divined the fact that Buckner the Long-knife might follow and that he would come into one of the nearest Indian towns at night to listen for news of her. He has done so. It was my own hands that fastened upon his ankles and jerked him from his feet."

"The right of the Delawares to the prisoner is certain," an influential Wyandotte brave agreed. "But it is not their privilege to burn the captive in the Wyandotte towns when it is against our customs."

"Then we shall start with him at once for our own towns and there scorch him well," a Delaware declared.

"This man is a great enemy of the Wyandottes and as such we wish to make sure of his death," a Wyandotte chief objected. "If you start with him for the Delaware towns, it is probable that he will escape."

"How can he escape us?" a Delaware demanded, striking his chest, "when there are five of us?"

"The wolf who has many times escaped the circle thrown about him by a hundred hunters might not find it difficult to escape from five," the other returned.

"But he is tied with bullhide and will remain so," a Delaware protested.

"A bird with a clipped wing, if kept alive too long, learns to fly again and escape the pot," a Wyandotte pointed out.

Still the Delawares stood upon their rights as captors.

"But why should you take the slightest chance in the case of such a prisoner?" one Wyandotte demanded impatiently. "He is the most dangerous Long-knife of them all. Also there is the fact that Kemper, the trader, offers the greatest price for his scalp that ever has been offered in the Ohio."

"Never fear. Buckner of the Long-knives will never again finger the hair of a warrior, and his own scalp shall be delivered to Kemper without fail. Then may the Wyandottes drink with the Delawares for many days and nights on the high wine we will receive for it."

It was so decided in council.

"What have you to say for yourself?" a brave asked Buckner, now that his fate had been settled.

"A warrior dies as his conquerors decide," Buckner returned.

"Then the Long-knife shall know the feel of the Delaware fires."

"No Delaware can kindle a fire so hot as to make Buckner weaken," the captive declared. "It is known to you that my knife would rust from disuse and my tomahawk grow dull before I would sharpen them upon women and children. Scores of scalps have I taken, and all of them from those whose knives were at my throat or whose muskets were trained upon my heart. Many great warriors have hunted me and I have slit their throats as an old dog wolf slays deer that are bogged to their ears in soft snow. Think you the Delaware lives who can strike fear to Buckner?"

There was a murmur of hostile approval. Hate him as a dangerous enemy they did; admire him as a great brave they must. That he knew, being intimately versed in redskin nature. He now prepared to try the plan he had devised—his one slim chance to live.

"I shake with silent laughter when I think of the big drinking spree the Delawares will have on the high wine that the dog Kemper will pay for my scalp," he scoffed.

"We will laugh with you as we drink to your departed spirit, flapping on scorched wings toward the happy hunting ground," a brave promised.

"If you hear strange sounds from the air above you, it will be the laughter of that same spirit," Buckner said. "Once I saw wolves that had run far for water, with their tongues protruding from thirst; and I watched their faces when those tongues were dipped in the hot sands of the false water hole that had gone dry."

"But the trading post of Kemper never goes dry. We have it straight from the tribes of the West that there is always much high wine stored there," a Delaware stated.

"There was always much water stored beneath the dry sands where the wolves sought to drink," Buckner said. "But the wolves could not reach it."

"But Kemper has given to the four winds his promise to pay a big price for the scalp of Buckner, the Long-knife," a brave pointed out.

"The bladder of a bull buffalo, if inflated and dried, gives off a great sound when used as a drum or a rattle," Buckner said, "but it is hollow and empty inside. Also, its emptiness takes on a fine appearance if the dried skin is painted. The Redcoats heard that Kemper's promises were but wind. They liked it not that one of their chiefs spoke with forked tongue.

They stripped off his scarlet jacket and found it to be but the paint which decorated a bladder drum that gave off false sounds."

All the tribes of the Ohio knew that Kemper had been captive to Buckner, who had spared his life; that the British had drummed Kemper out of their army because he had violated a promise to his preserver. They pondered Buckner's words for a space in silence.

"Kemper has not been a Redcoat for many years now," Buckner said, "wherefore he longs for the scalp of Buckner, the Long-knife."

"Well, he shall have it," a Delaware asserted. "He will keep his faith with the red men even though he violated his faith with the whites."

"The buzzard who betrays his own nest mates for a mouthful of carrion will not hesitate to defraud the crows of a banquet," Buckner confidently prophesied.

"If he breaks a promise to me, he will find my knife in his heart!" a warrior declared fiercely, his knife flashing into his hand. "I shall take one scalp to him. If he refuses to pay, I shall bring two scalps back with me."

"Would that Manitou so arranges it," Buckner said. "I could die in peace with the knowledge that my scalp was to be the means of guiding your knife to the black heart of Kemper. But it will not come to pass. When you take my scalp to him, he will not pay. Neither will you slay him."

"Do you think my words are but wind?" the brave

demanded angrily, his knife flashing before the captive's eyes.

"No—but that his are," Buckner said. "His tongue will lead you on false trails and you will be swayed from your purpose."

"My ears will listen only to straight words," the warrior boasted. "How could his lying tongue delude the ears of a Delaware?"

"The tongue of the mocking bird is never at a loss for new songs that delude the ears of the feathered tribes," Buckner said.

"But what false song can this Kemper sing to me when I appear before him with your scalp and demand the high wine?" the Delaware insisted.

"He would relate to you the story of the hawk who promised to provide meat for a jay if the jay would coax the great horned owl forth into the daylight and lead him to some spot where the crows would kill him. The jay returned after many days with a feather in its bill and presented it to the hawk, proclaiming that it was from the body of the owl who had been slain by the crows at a distant point. The hawk inspected the feather and declared it to be that of a tiny screech owl, accused the jay of speaking with a split tongue and refused to provide the meat."

The assembled warriors pondered this for a space.

"It is true that scalps have much the same appearance," a brave commented at last, his eye roving over Buckner's head. "And this Long-knife wears his hair after the fashion of a brave. Yes, it would be difficult to prove from whose head it was

taken if this Kemper chose not to believe those who brought it."

"I have it!" a brave exclaimed. "We will take this Long-knife to the post on the Wabash and slay him before Kemper's eyes."

"It is many sleeps from here," another objected.

That plan, however, was adopted. Buckner sighed with relief. On a long march of that sort he would devise some means of escape. His taunts had been planned to that end. A bull-hide collar was looped about his neck and attached by a stout rawhide cable to the waist of a powerful brave. With his hands pinioned behind him, he set off on the long journey to the westward with an escort of a dozen warriors. His eyes roved over the faces of the jeering throng for a last glimpse of White Fawn but she was nowhere to be seen. He was not sure that she had been informed of his capture. No doubt she had resumed her journey toward her home town among the Shawnees.

"Watch this man well," a sub-chief of the Wyandottes admonished as they left the town. "He is strong and active as a bull elk, with the courage of the wolverine and as slippery as the weasel. One careless second and he will be gone from you."

Hour after hour the little procession filed through the forest. It was late in the autumn and frost was to be expected any night, which made the insect pests all the more insistent and ravenous as if they realized that each taste of blood or meat might be their last. The flies and mosquitoes clustered on the

captive in swarms and he could not free himself of them. The bullhide chafed his neck and the thongs that bound his wrist bit deep into his flesh. And as he strode on and on, a fierce resentment against those of his own race who were responsible for his plight found lodgment in his breast. Save for those at Crenshaw Bottom, their course sanctioned at least by the Pennsylvania authorities, he would now have been well on his way to Kentucky with White Fawn. Was it in this fashion that those for whom he had fought the long years would reward him? He was by no means the first borderer to receive such treatment at the hands of those residing in quieter communities far to the rear; by no means the first, in fact, to be rescued by his border friends. Always there had been that bitter difference between those of the present frontier who still sought to protect their lands against the savages and those of past frontiers whose lands had long been safe. Always it was the status of the land that tinged men's viewpoints. That difference was to persist for another hundred years, the settlers of each successive frontier fiercely insisting upon their rights to encroach further into the Indian lands, those in the rear forever clamoring against further aggression.

That rankling sense of injustice grew upon Buckner as his bonds bit into him and the flies and mosquitoes feasted on him. Worst of all was the weight on his spirit from the prospect of missing life with White Fawn. The very thought of her sent a gentle madness through his veins, the vision of her face ob-

scuring his whole horizon. He swore an oath that if he made his escape he would never again set foot in those settled communities behind the frontier but would live out his life on the border where dwelt his own iron breed of men. Few among the hundreds of border woodsmen of his acquaintance who had not made similar vows in his hearing, for some reason or another. He now made one himself.

Toward nightfall, the procession filed into an Indian town. A British trader watched from among the jeering throng of savages. Later he came to the lodge where Buckner was confined under guard and sought to purchase the captive's life. Eventually, his offer was raised to include all of his rum and trade goods and his own gun and horses. The Delawares declined to listen to his offers and finally grew threatening, expelling him from the lodge. They had rescued many a luckless captive, these British traders. It was not the man's fault that he had failed. He had offered all that he possessed. No man could do more than that.

The Delawares loitered in the town until well along toward noon before resuming the march. That night they bivouacked at a spring. The rawhide rope attached to Buckner's neck was fastened to a tree, his bound ankles secured to a sapling and his hands securely pinioned behind his back. Not all of his captors slept at any one time. Always there were two or more sitting there stolidly at the fire, their eyes turning to him at his slightest move.

Tentatively, he tensed and flexed his great arm

muscles. It was possible, he believed, for him to break the thongs that bound his wrists.

He made no effort to release himself at that time. During the next two overnight halts Buckner slept but little, pretending to be wrapped in heavy slumber while in reality he watched to determine if the vigilance of the few Delawares who had been detailed to remain awake as guards would be relaxed. If they should fall asleep and give him but a few short minutes, he could free himself. He could break the bonds on his wrists with one wrench, untie the thongs that secured his feet in the space of a minute, rise silently to untie the neckrope from the tree and fade into the forest, freeing his neck of it as he ran. Not once, however, did all of his captors sleep at the same time and a false start would be fatal to his plans. So, with untiring patience, he watched his chance. On several occasions, the two guards allowed their heads to fall forward on their chests. One or the other, however, never failed to rouse with a start within a half minute and peer at the captive.

On the evening of the fifth day the skies were overcast with gray that seemed to darken and to descend as night approached, so lowering as to lend the appearance that a leaden canopy was supported by the tips of the forest trees. As night shut down with its excessive blackness, the forest was gripped in unearthly silence, as if the prowlers of the night held their breath in fearful anticipation of what the elements might do.

Before morning there would be snow, the Del-

awares predicted. Buckner knew it too. The feel of it was in the air for the wild things and all humans who slept upon the ground to read. That would be bad for Buckner's plans. With snow on the ground, his only course would be to make a run of it to the Ohio and swim to the Kentucky shore. The river should be somewhere round forty miles due south of him. The westernmost fringe of the Shawnee towns were almost in his line of flight and he would have to veer slightly west to miss them. His own former home town, he estimated, was about twenty miles to the south. As his mind was occupied with these matters there was the slightest rattle of the leafless branches overhead as if the merest breath of wind stirred them. Then the first flakes of the coming storm burned the naked skin of Buckner's torso and face.

His captors slept, each rolled in his single skin robe or trade blanket, except the two guards who sat with their blankets wrapped to their chins. Whether the guards slept or not, he must make his try for freedom this night. Reclining on his side, his face to the savages, he waited until the fire had burned to coals that shed but a feeble light. Then, the guards apparently having dropped into one of their brief naps, Buckner tensed his muscles for the wrench that would part the thongs on his wrists. The heads of the guards sagged on their chests. Buckner's muscles bulged with the strain. He relaxed suddenly as a thudding sound came from the forest behind him. On the instant, every Delaware

was awake and peering about him. For the space of a minute, all listened in silence. Had they been in enemy country they would have investigated.

"Bear," said one of the guards, who had been asleep but professed to have been awake.

Buckner, who had been awake, doubted that the sound had been made by a bear.

One after another, the Delawares relaxed again and slept.

While he waited with stolid patience, Buckner reflected upon the difficulties of his task. A sleeping redskin was the most difficult creature in the world to take by surprise. Buckner had participated in scores of surprise attacks staged by woodsmen against parties of sleeping savages. The amazing celerity with which each warrior attained his feet in instant readiness to put up a desperate fight had never failed to recall to Buckner's mind the actions of a sleeping cat when surprised by a snarling dog —transformed in a half-second into a spitting demon with back arched, teeth and claws unsheathed.

CHAPTER XIV

The two guards drowsed intermittently but not for a sufficient period to afford the chance for which he waited. But he must make his effort soon now. They no longer paid much heed to his threshing about as if to free his body of snow. Again a slight sound came from behind him, the least rustling, as if some tiny creature crawled through the snow.

A cold shock flooded his being as something touched his hand from behind with a hot stab of pain. His fingers writhed up to explore it and felt the blade of a heavy knife. Further exploration revealed the fact that its handle was lashed to the slender tip of a pole. Help was at hand. Some lone woodsman on a scout in the Indian country, or perhaps the British trader who had tried to ransom him, had writhed up to the base of a tree fifteen feet away to thrust this knife forward on the tip of a long slender pole. Swiftly, Buckner's groping fingers freed it of its lashings and cramped it up to bear upon the thongs that bound his wrists. They parted and slid from him. Watching the two guards. he bent his knees to the limit while his underneath hand slid down to sever the rawhide that secured his ankles. Tingling in every nerve, he slipped that

lower hand back up his body, twisting his elbow to an uncomfortable angle, until the point of the knife found the rawhide neckrope. One of the guards stirred and glanced toward him, then settled back. The knife completed its work. Buckner gathered his muscles to rise silently. Both guards seemed to sleep. The captive was in the act of rising when the nearest Delaware gave a sudden start and threw off his blanket. Before the savage could rise from where he sat, Buckner hurled the heavy knife and the point of it found the soft spot at the base of the warrior's throat. He fell forward with a gurgling cry. Even as Buckner leaped away, every Delaware was on his feet, a yell of rage sounding through the night. A red splash flared almost in Buckner's face from the inky darkness and an explosion rocked his ears as his rescuer fired from behind a tree and shot down another Delaware. Buckner lifted his voice in the wild yell of the border woodsmen, the war cry of his clan, and shouted a command to charge the camp. The Delawares took to the shelter of the trees, prepared to defend themselves against attack. Buckner, with his rescuer pressing close upon his heels, gained a hundred yards into the black shadows of the forest before the pursuit was organized.

A voice said softly from behind him, "Bear a bit more to the left."

The voice was that of White Fawn and the shock of it was so great that he almost halted.

"Take the lead," he said. "I will follow at your gait."

She slipped ahead on the run and fled like a startled deer, pressing a musket into his hand as she passed. For the space of a minute, the forest behind them echoed to the cries of the Delawares as they started in pursuit. Then all was silent and Buckner knew that they had picked up the trail in the half-inch snow and were following at their best speed. White Fawn was but a fleeing shadow ahead of him. She led the way through a broad drift of shed leaves that the gentle breeze had stirred enough to spill the snow from them; later through a broad opening where the light snowfall had sifted down through the tall grass. Unerringly, she chose such going as would make it most difficult for the Delawares to hold the trail on so black a night, even with the revealing powder of snow on the ground.

As Buckner's cramped muscles relaxed with action and the power flowed back to them, elation lifted his spirit and buoyed his heart with the knowledge that White Fawn had flanked the trail of his captors from the first. Living like a wild thing of the forest, she had stayed close at hand during the nights while she watched her chance to slip the knife to him. They must have a half-mile lead upon the Delawares by now, he estimated. White Fawn still fled on ahead like a startled hare. Her endurance was that of a woodsman. Dawn would not overtake them for another five hours. They should gain at least a mile an hour upon the Delawares, he thought. By daylight they would have covered two thirds of the distance to the Ohio and would have a five-mile lead. They

came to another broad opening and White Fawn darted quarteringly across it.

When they came again into the forest she spoke a word to Buckner and passed back a powder horn and bullet pouch as they ran. Adept at reloading on the run, as were all woodsmen, he soon had the musket recharged. She then passed him a tomahawk which he fastened at his belt. At the end of the first hour, it seemed to him that the girl's pace had slowed somewhat. Nevertheless, she ran steadily. At the end of another hour, he found himself crowding upon her heels even when he trotted. They had covered over ten miles by now, he estimated; but at their present gait the Delawares would be holding their own. The snow, shallow as it was, prevented the fugitives from breaking their trail save at certain strategic points. It was a bit deeper here and for the past half-hour they had left the plainest of trails. Presently it seemed to him that the girl ran only with great effort.

"Do you tire, my heart?" he asked in Shawnee.

"Yes," she confessed. "It is the blood. The loss of it weakens me."

"Blood!" Buckner exclaimed, fear tugging at his heart.

Without halting, struggling gamely ahead, she explained that as she had neared the camp, the long pole balanced in one hand, the knife in the other, she had fallen into a depression in the forest floor. In her endeavor to keep the pole aloft so it would not clatter to earth, she had fallen upon the knife,

which had slashed her thigh. The fall had occasioned the sound that had roused the Delawares and mystified Buckner. Calling a halt, Buckner swiftly explored the wound with his fingers. It was not dangerous, but continuous exertion for many hours might easily cause sufficient loss of blood to result fatally. It was almost thirty miles to the Ohio. Buckner cursed under his breath. Mingled with his anxiety for White Fawn was that dark rage at those of his own race whose meddling ingratitude had brought her to this pass. Swiftly, he revised his plans.

"Bear more to the east," he said, although the course to which they had been holding was barely far enough to the west to clear the most westerly of the Shawnee towns. Their own former home town could not be more than ten miles to the southwest. "Travel slowly and apply snow to the wound to staunch the flow of blood."

The girl obeyed without question. Carefully, he estimated their rate of travel. They covered another two miles. The Shawnee town could not be much more than eight miles away.

"Do you travel on slowly, White Fawn, and hold a direct southeast course," he instructed. "Do not overexert yourself, my heart. I stay here to throw them off the trail. Then I will circle to you. Answer three hoots of the great horned owl."

He swung to the right and traveled back swiftly on a course parallel to their trail. After half a mile, he moved over until his searching eyes found their tracks. Then he stationed himself behind a huge

tree beside the trail and waited. The minutes dragged by. The Delawares could not be far behind now. His eyes were of small use, so dark was the night. One could not see a man a dozen feet away. Looking down at the vague white of the snow, the vision was somewhat aided—to a sufficient extent, at least, so the Delawares would have no trouble in following the trail, even though not at top speed.

Another minute passed. Then his straining ears caught the soft tramp of feet. Not until the leading savage was within a dozen feet could Buckner's eyes discern the vague shape in the gloom. As the first warrior drew abreast of him, Buckner swung his tomahawk down upon his skull and felled him. Instantly, the woodsman fired his musket at the breast of the next dark shape on the trail, then turned and darted straight west through the forest.

Cries of rage followed him, also the balls of a half-dozen muskets that were fired blindly after him.

"Follow Buckner through the forest at night if you will!" he roared back to them in the Delaware tongue, "I will slay the last of you before dawn. It is a game that I like."

Then they were off in hot pursuit of him. He ran at his best gait until he knew that they had lost the sound of his progress and must again resort to following his trail. After a mile to the westward, he angled to the south and held on for another two miles, then veered to the east. Three times in that distance he had made short circles of twenty yards or more and crossed his own trail. With the recent

lesson fresh in their minds, each such circle would cause confusion and doubt in the ranks of the Delawares. Inevitably, they would fear that he had been circling to repeat his former deadly maneuver. It was the sort of deed that Buckner was noted for. On a night so black, and knowing that they would be on his trail, he could choose his own place to strike. Realization of that fact would slow them up. No doubt of that. Dawn was not far off now. They would move with greater caution until then, relying upon their ability to overtake him after daylight had rendered impossible another successful assault upon superior numbers.

Buckner hooted three times in imitation of the great horned owl. Receiving no answer, he pressed on for a short distance, then repeated the signal. An answer drifted back and he found White Fawn still plodding ahead. He caught her up in his arms and leaped on through the night. It was snowing harder now. In the first faint light of dawn he put the girl down upon her own feet at the edge of the Shawnee town. Through the swirling snow, they advanced to the lodge of Standing Bear. The Shawnee waked as they entered. He gave no sign of surprise.

"What do you do here?" he inquired.

"We come to rejoin the Shawnees," Buckner said. "The Long-knives imprisoned me and I escaped. Unfortunately, I was forced to take the lives of Delawares who captured me. I will tell you."

Briefly, he recited the events since he had set foot on the Indian side of the Ohio in his effort to over-

take White Fawn. Then he led the girl to the lodge of Tonk-a-naw. The old warrior was not so imperturbable as Standing Bear had been. He grunted in frank surprise.

Buckner had taken every characteristic of Indian mental processes into consideration before deciding upon his manner of approach.

"We have returned to join our brothers, the Shawnees," he said. "We may live here forever. Who knows? I have purchased White Fawn from the head of her lodge among the Long-knives, so she is mine in the eyes of men, but I have not yet taken her to wife. Since you were once the head of her lodge, I would pay you a large price because you gave her better treatment than was accorded her by the white man from whom I purchased her. It is more by way of a present that I make you in return for your good treatment of her when she was young." Casually, he mentioned a big price in trade goods and rum, enumerating the articles.

Tonk-a-naw was not quite sure of his own standing in the matter, since Buckner had purchased the girl among the whites and returned with her, casually claiming her as his squaw. Buckner spoke as if this big price was a present, not an offer for the girl. Perhaps Tonk-a-naw had no further rights in her and the matter would be decided that way in open council if a controversy should arise. And Tonk-a-naw was of no mind to decline this sudden offer of wealth that was so unexpectedly thrust upon him this cold morning at dawn. Up to this point,

Buckner had divined correctly what the Shawnee's mental processes would be. It was the final obstacle —the redskin custom of lengthy deliberation that now must be overcome. Time was very short. But he counted also upon the fact that Tonk-a-naw had once lost out altogether by too long a deliberation over Kemper's offers. That, too, was in the Shawnee's mind.

"It is done," he agreed, with but the merest pretense of deliberation.

Buckner was conscious of a vast influx of relief. But outwardly he remained perfectly calm.

"Of course I cannot pay the price until such time as peace comes and I can secure the goods from my relatives in Kentucky," he said carelessly.

"I will wait," Tonk-a-naw said. "It is known to me that your tongue is straight. But White Fawn must not go to your lodge as your squaw until I have received the goods. Otherwise you might die before securing them and Tonk-a-naw would be the loser."

"It is written," Buckner agreed. As if the matter had been settled for all time, he turned and strolled slowly back through the falling snow to the lodge of his brother. In the brief time allotted to him, he had spiked a few of the enemy guns at least. The knowledge of White Fawn's great value would prevent Tonk-a-naw from surrendering her into the hands of the Delawares for the part she had played in Buckner's escape. She was safe, no matter what his own fate might be. And if he did survive the coming ordeal, it would be public knowledge that Tonk-

a-naw had accepted his offer for the girl and it would be Buckner's right to deal with those who sought to set aside that agreement.

As he entered his brother's lodge, his former mother, Winnebanca, greeted him with tears of rejoicing, the young squaw of Standing Bear according him a shy friendliness. Gray Wolf, once William Herne, and Tecumseh, now a stalwart young warrior of grave and haughty demeanor, entered and seated themselves. A dozen other former friends of Buckner, summoned by Standing Bear, filed into the lodge.

"My brother comes to rejoin the Shawnees," Standing Bear said.

"And why?" Tecumseh asked.

"Because he is no longer welcome among the Longknives except those of the border," said Standing Bear.

"Does he come to fight with the Shawnees?" Tecumseh inquired.

"No," Buckner said. "My hands are weary of war and my heart is on the ground from watching good men die. I come to live among the Shawnees until peace is declared."

"But on the way to rejoin us," said Standing Bear, "he was forced to slay several Delaware braves who sought to prevent his reaching us and who would have sold his scalp to Kemper, the trader of the West. Even now the others are on his trail and will arrive any moment."

"That is bad," Tecumseh said reflectively. "The

Delawares are our friends. They will demand him as their prisoner."

"But I am no man's prisoner, as you can see," Buckner placidly pointed out. "Am I not here of my own accord, with my good feet under me and weapons in my hands? I wish to remain here, not to escape."

He did not think it necessary to explain that his chief reason for wishing to remain was through the fear that if he went on alone and left White Fawn here she would fall into the hands of Kemper. He knew that the few friends here could not decide his fate. The matter must be decided in open council, as Buckner and the Shawnees present well knew.

They discussed the matter gravely. Presently eight Delaware warriors filed from the forest and advanced through the swirling smother of flakes. Discovering from inquiry the whereabouts of their former prisoner they came to the lodge of Standing Bear and demanded him.

"He came not to us as a prisoner but as a free man and a guest," the Shawnee informed them. "As a guest in my lodge he is entitled to my protection until his case has been decided in open council."

The council was called before noon. The matter was complicated by the arrival of a war party of forty-odd wild northwestern tribesmen, mixed Chippewas and Ojibwas, led by ferocious chiefs whose sole remedy for all difficulties was to slay. They had been raiding on the Ohio and now were returning to their homes in the North for the winter. As allies, they were entitled to vote in council. Almost two hundred

Shawnee warriors assembled in the huge council house. Fires roared within as the screeching blizzard roared outside. The council opened with the formal demand by the Delawares that the prisoner be delivered into their hands. Standing Bear countered with the declaration that Buckner had come of his own accord, as a free man, and hence was entitled to the privileges of a guest among the Shawnees, not to be viewed as a prisoner of the Delawares. The latter insisted that the fugitive had been too hard-pressed to escape and, knowing that he would soon fall into their hands again, had only saved himself by the ruse of throwing himself upon the mercy of the Shawnees. Hence, they claimed, he was still technically their prisoner. This elicited fierce exclamations of approval from the wild northern tribesmen. Several of the Shawnees testified that Buckner had arrived a full hour in advance of the Delawares but had declined to make good his escape, declaring instead his purpose to rejoin his brothers the Shawnees.

"Why did you wish to rejoin the Shawnees?" the spokesman of the Delawares asked.

"I killed two men who sought my life," Buckner stated, "and am not welcome in the settlements."

There was nothing unusual in a white man fleeing from the settlements to the Indian country to seek shelter from the strange laws of the whites. The wilderness was full of such fugitives from justice. No less a personage than Simon Kenton had fled from Virginia long ago and had lived in the Indian

country for years under another name before returning.

"Could the Delawares have overtaken you when you came to our town?" the Shawnee spokesman inquired.

"I arrived an hour ahead of them," Buckner said. "Is there any here who can give Buckner one minute the start and overtake him again?"

"The fox that could so easily have escaped the hounds does not voluntarily halt to be overwhelmed by their teeth," the Delaware insinuated.

"When I fled from the whites to rejoin the Shawnees, should I flee on past the Shawnees and deliver myself again to the whites because a few Delawares yelped on my trail?" Buckner demanded.

Then Tecumseh rose and held up his hand for silence. Young as he was, and not yet attained to chieftainhood, Tecumseh's prestige was spreading among the Indian confederacy. Already, from his calm wisdom and clear insight into all matters, eyes were turning to him as the savior of the peoples of Manitou. His implacable hostility toward the encroaching settlers and his counsel to the effect that only by resistance, never by treaty, could the red men retain even a portion of their lands, had made a widespread impression.

Now his bugle voice sounded above the crackle of the flames and the roar of the storm outside. Every ear in the smoke-hung council house was strained to catch his every word. Graphically, he recited many things in Buckner's favor as a great warrior who

took life only in battle and whose word could be relied upon by enemy and friend alike. He described the time that Buckner had saved him from death at the hands of Donner's men. His speech made a favorable impression even on the wild northern tribesmen. Their eyes glittered through the smoke to rest upon the captive. His own fearless demeanor found favor with them.

It had been well established, Tecumseh said, that Buckner had come to the Shawnees as a free man, and as of natural consequence was entitled to be viewed as a guest. The Delawares were the friends and allies of the Shawnees, and the latter could not harbor their enemies. There was but one equitable course which would violate neither the obligations of the Shawnees to a guest nor the rights of the Delawares as friends. Buckner had come to the Shawnee town an hour ahead of the Delawares. He should leave it an hour ahead of them. If he could beat them to the Ohio and cross to Kentucky, it was his right. If the Delawares could overtake him and lift his scalp, well and good.

This was received with loud exclamations of approval.

Buckner rose.

"If the council so decides," he said, "I would ask the privilege to return to the Shawnees as a free man to live among them."

A vote was taken and the proposal was adopted unanimously. Buckner had arrived at dawn, an hour ahead of the Delawares. An hour before dawn he

should leave; and at dawn they were to start out on his trail.

An hour before daylight, with the assembled population of the Shawnee town and all visiting braves looking on, Buckner was given the signal and leaped into the forest. The storm had ceased and it was not difficult to see with the forest floor carpeted with white. He knew the country intimately from his rambles as a boy, knew where the easiest going was to be found. With the first faint rays of dawn, he was bounding tirelessly as a wolf, over a third of the way to the Ohio. Far behind him, the eager Delawares were just being started on his trail by the Shawnees. He laughed as he pictured the scene, breathed deep of the crisp air and ran steadily on toward the Ohio.

At sunset, the Delawares and a few of the Shawnees and visiting tribesmen who had elected to accompany the Delawares on the race returned. Buckner strode at their head.

"When we reached the Ohio, Buckner the Long-knife sat on the far shore, waiting for us to appear," the Delaware spokesman said. "He escaped us this time, so it is sure that he would have escaped us before, had he held on instead of stopping here. The words of Tecumseh the Shawnee were wise. The test was fair. It was written."

CHAPTER XV

Despite the thirty-year peace between England and the United States, the allied tribes of the Ohio and Illinois wilderness carried on a war of their own against the encroaching settlers of the latter nation, ceaseless save for a few brief periods of unstable peace. Meanwhile they regarded England as a friend, though no longer as an active ally, and permitted those of British allegiance to prowl through the Indian country.

Desperate criminals, fleeing from justice in the United States, entered the Indian country and posed to the Indians as deserters to the British cause, as if assuming that the two nations were still at war.

Almost a half-century of border warfare had developed a breed of men so inured to hardship, constant danger and the free and reckless life of the woods that life in the settlements proved intolerably slow and irksome. The majority of them joined the brotherhood of the border fringe as the frontier was pushed farther and farther into the land of the setting sun. They became perhaps the most useful body of men on successive frontiers.

Others had become so steeped in bloodshed, violence and pillage that they had lost all sense of nationality. Outlawed from the settlements for

crimes of violence, which they perpetrated upon those of their own race with as little compunction as formerly they had committed outrages upon the Indians, they took to the wilderness. There they lived in little groups, vicious and depraved beyond all understanding.

As the Indians were pushed on toward the west, a new menace took the place of former savage forays. The desperate outcast whites grouped themselves into larger units, some operating as mere pillaging mobs, others as organizations led by chiefs more terrible and bloody-minded than any that the red nations had produced, preying upon those of their own race and leaving a trail of blood and desolation in their wake.

For a generation after the close of the Revolution, commerce in the more westerly settlements was almost exclusively a matter of barter and exchange—a trading of surplus commodities for other necessities between individuals and communities. The settlements of Kentucky and Tennessee could be supplied with the merchandise of the East only by means of pack outfits operating through the passes of the Cumberlands from Southern Virginia and the Carolinas and by flatboats coming down the Ohio from Pennsylvania. By the close of the Revolution, pack-train commerce, particularly, was already well established. Shortly thereafter, desirous of opening trade with the Spaniards of the South, communities clubbed together to ship surplus commodities down the Ohio to the Mississippi and down that stream to New

Orleans, there to be traded for Spanish merchandise. Thus the clan of the keel-boaters came into existence, living a wild, hard life of exceeding toil that either killed or developed physiques of tremendous strength and endurance. A reckless lot, proud of their calling, in which only the most perfect human animals could survive, the keel-boaters upheld the traditions of their clan as a fighting, hard-drinking breed. They took their pay largely in liquor and drank it where they found it, enlivening the sprees in their camps by fighting among themselves for no other purpose than that of proving physical superiority.

The pack-outfitters were scarcely less rough and fierce, though not making a cult of their toughness as did the brotherhood of the keel boats. Naturally, such men were not easily preyed upon, for when attacked by outside enemies they shot and knifed as expertly as they fought with fist and foot for pastime or to determine physical supremacy among themselves. No men were better equipped than the drovers of the pack trains and the crews of the keel boats to defend themselves against the perils of their calling.

Nevertheless, tempted by the prizes to be reaped by plundering such richly laden outfits, the vicious whites, outcast from the United States, Canada and Spanish and French America, banded together in powerful organizations to prey upon the inland commerce of all nations. These freebooters of the interior were no less bloody and ruthless in their methods than those of their kind who had followed

the trade of piracy and floated the black flag on the high seas. With strongholds in the cane brakes of Tennessee, the swamps of Louisiana and Arkansas and the hills of Missouri as the frontier moved westward, they swooped forth to commit every sort of fiendish depredation known to mankind—murdering, outraging, torturing and terrorizing. They murdered harmless travelers for sheer lust of blood. They terrorized isolated communities into paying tribute in food and horses in return for a precarious immunity.

Hardy and competent as were the men of the pack trains and the keel boats, it became necessary to conduct all such commerce under heavily armed escorts.

In the beginning, before the Indians had been moved beyond the Mississippi, these groups of depraved whites operated with much greater secrecy, garbing themselves as savages so their depredations would be fastened upon the Indians. Among the first such vicious crews to operate as organized bands was one composed of the renegade whites who had congregated near Kemper's post on a stream that flowed to the Wabash.

Buckner's first intimation of the activities of this nefarious crew was derived from piecing together scraps of Shawnee conversation. During the summer a particularly atrocious affair occurred well down the Ohio. Two flatboats, loaded with the families and effects of several settlers, were decoyed ashore and captured. A woodsman, viewing the affair from

far off on the Kentucky shore, slipped over to the Indian side later to discover that of the twenty-odd occupants of the boats, all had been slain on the spot except two young women. Evidently they had been led into captivity. The news had been common knowledge among the settlements of Kentucky for some time, but the Shawnees had heard nothing of the matter until a war party returned from Kentucky some two months later with several prisoners. One of the latter inquired what tribe had taken the two boats and slaughtered the occupants. Such captures were by no means infrequent but each instance of the sort was soon known in every detail to all of the tribes of the Ohio. The Shawnees told the captive that he must be mistaken. Later a few Delawares, returning along the Ohio from far to the westward, chanced across signs of the outrage and made inquiry of the Shawnees as to what war parties had captured the boats.

Buckner heard all that within a few days after rejoining the Shawnees. A week later, a small party of Wyandottes reported having found the remains of two men that had been excavated by wolves from a shallow grave in the forest. Indians seldom, if ever, buried their victims. It was odd, too, that the raiding party had killed all of the captives on the spot save two young women. Then, quite suddenly, as if the details had worked themselves into a perfect pattern without any conscious help on his part, Buckner knew that the atrocity had been perpetrated by the renegade whites that headquartered near

Kemper's post in the Wabash country. The spot where the wolves had excavated the bodies of the two young women was within a day's march of Kemper's post. No witness had been left alive to testify. It was common knowledge that Kemper incited the savages to plunder flatboats and traded rum to them for the goods secured. What could be easier than for Kemper and his associates to garb themselves as Indians and capture an occasional rich prize on their own account? Bloody monsters, all of them, it was their natural tendency to slay and pillage. But why should they have kept their activities in that line a secret from the Indians? The answer was formulated even before Buckner put that query to himself.

Those men posed as British subjects. Some few of them were. England was at peace with the United States. If men posing as British traders made war against citizens of the rival nation, it would constitute an act of aggression for which England would have to compensate—or rectify by the summary punishment of the offenders. Many of those men in the wilderness of the Wabash were outcasts from the United States, with a price on their heads in case they should return. They had no desire to become embroiled with the British authorities. Their activities, therefore, must be kept secret. Buckner was convinced that the renegade of the Wabash country had been responsible in person for that particular outrage. But his conviction was unsupported by a shred of proof.

Winter was the time of famine among the red

nations of the Ohio. Warriors must turn hunters to provide food for their household. Many of them scattered, a few lodges traveling together to winter in some favored hunting ground. Buckner accompanied the lodge of Standing Bear, consisting of the Shawnee, his squaw and two children and his widowed mother, Winnebanca. With them went the lodges of Gray Wolf and Tonk-a-naw, numbering some thirty souls all told. For the purpose of further perfecting himself in the English tongue by conversing with Buckner, Tecumseh elected to accompany them, instead of remaining with his own people.

The party made a winter camp some twenty miles from the Shawnee town and erected quarters. At first the hunters found game in plenty but a few weeks of hunting served to diminish the supply. This scarcity became more pronounced as the winter advanced and there were long periods when the camp was in actual want. Bones were roasted and cracked open for the marrow.

Despite the pinch of hunger and the arduous labor of following the meat trail day after day, Buckner found himself occupied with exactly the sort of life that appealed to him above all others. His proximity to White Fawn in the winter camp was a scource of constant satisfaction as he planned their life together when peace should come again and they could return to the frontier settlements.

Game was very scarce and famine was at its height as the winter dragged to an end. Buckner and Tecumseh, after three days of hunting from a biv-

ouac, were fortunate enough to kill two does. They started back at once to relieve the famine in the main camp.

"Each year the Shawnees are closer to starvation," Tecumseh said. "We have lost forever our ancestral hunting grounds in Kentucky. We must subsist more and more upon the game near our towns, which grows scarcer yearly from overmuch hunting. Scarcely a summer passes but what a large body of soldiers makes a swift march and lays waste our crops, which forces us to rely upon the game that is disappearing."

It was true that the Shawnees suffered heavily from such expeditions. The most southerly of the Shawnee towns were within a day's forced march of the Ohio. It was customary to send large bodies of troops from Kentucky. The inhabitants of the towns fled. The soldiers cut down the green corn with their sabers and retreated before the tribes could muster a sufficient body of warriors to oppose them. The white losses were considerable because small parties of Shawnee braves harassed the rear and flanks of all such columns and took heavy toll without suffering any considerable loss on the Indian side. But the loss of the crops was always a severe blow. Gradually, the red men of the Ohio were being starved into submission or retreat.

"For twenty years we have taken ten scalps for every one that we have lost," Tecumseh said. "But the Long-knives are many, the Shawnees but few. They are too strong for us. Soon, now, we will be

forced to fall back and give up the Ohio from sheer starvation. Not for much longer will the Ohio River be the dead line."

"It is true," Buckner agreed. "Perhaps if you cede the Ohio country to the whites by treaty, they will agree to give the red nations the Illinois region for all time."

"Treaties are but wind. The white men make promises to the red men only to break them when they see fit. Never since the first white man set foot on American shores have they kept a treaty. And they never will. The Indians are a vanishing race, my friend. They are doomed to perish from the earth. Tecumseh sees it written. It will be my mission to counsel against further treaties, which are made only to be broken, and to lead the red nations in war to delay the inevitable end as long as possible."

Buckner had been expecting a visit from Kemper and Benoit at any time. But the Indians traveled little in winter and news did not spread rapidly. It was not until spring that word of White Fawn's return to the Shawnees reached the distant post in the wilderness of the Wabash. The three lodges of Shawnees had left the winter hunting camp and returned to their town before Kemper put in an appearance.

He came with Benoit and two other renegade whites. They brought a pack train loaded with liquor and trade goods. There could be little doubt as to Kemper's purpose. His regular trading territory was

many days' travel to the westward and he had little to gain in a material way from a trading trip to the Shawnees. Their country was full of traders; and at this time of year the Shawnees were destitute of furs, having traded in all they possessed for food and liquor during the winter months.

Knowing this, Kemper had brought coffee, sugar and other concentrated foods. He made many small presents of sugar to hungry squaws and children. Particularly was he generous to Tonk-a-naw and those of his lodge in the matter of food and drink. Knowing little of Indian customs, he was annoyed at first because Tonk-a-naw seemingly did not respond in the same friendly spirit and invite him to stay as a guest in his lodge. Benoit, versed in every detail of savage life and customs, explained that the suitor for the hand of any maiden never visited as a guest in her lodge nor did she visit in the lodge where the suitor was domiciled.

Kemper believed that the only feature in obtaining the hand of a girl among the Indians was to outbid all competitors. He knew that Buckner was practically pauperized for the present, at least, so he had no doubt of the outcome.

Benoit knew otherwise. At first he was not quite sure of Buckner's present status among the Shawnees, thinking that perhaps he was merely on a precarious probation among them. But on the first day, observing that Buckner was fully armed and free to come and go as he chose without being watched, he knew that the woodsman was considered a

Shawnee in good standing. He knew, too, that while all courting among the Indians was conducted through the head of the lodge, the maiden herself apparently having no hand in the decision, it was very seldom that a girl went to any save the suitor for whom she evinced the greatest preference. All such under-the-surface customs were unknown to Kemper. In the final analysis, with many women to be had through the simple expedient of capturing flatboats, Benoit had small sympathy for Kemper's obsession to own this one woman despite all obstacles. The mission was not to Benoit's fancy and he made no secret of it. Savage and conscienceless as a wild boar, he nevertheless was endowed with too much practical wisdom to jeopardize his life to no purpose.

"Keep your head," he growled to Kemper. "Buckner's on his own ground here. You can't pick a quarrel with a Shawnee and kill him in his own town and escape with your hair. Remember that."

"Shawnee!" Kemper scoffed. "He's no more Shawnee than I am. He's a white refugee from the United States."

"Once a man's been adopted into an Indian tribe he is considered one of them, the same as if he'd been born in their lodges. There's even a ceremony of rebirth, meaning that he has been reborn an Indian. I'm an adopted Ojibwa myself, so I know."

Kemper shrugged his indifference.

"Mark me! Buckner will sit back and offer no offense to you as a guest of the Shawnees," Benoit

said. "If you lose your ugly temper and give public offense to him, it will be his excuse to kill you. And if you should kill him, it would be as the aggressor, and the Shawnees would take our scalps. Never doubt it."

Meanwhile, no longer rated as an enemy but as a Shawnee in good standing and with Tonk-a-naw's agreement common knowledge throughout the tribe, Buckner pursued his course as placidly as Benoit had predicted. Kemper, without Benoit's knowledge, set in motion a scheme of his own for Buckner's undoing. Benoit, knowing the kinks of Indian nature, would have vetoed it flatly had he known of it.

Twice, when passing Buckner, Kemper made slurring remarks pertaining to the sorry lot of an outcast who was forced to seek refuge among the savages. On each occasion, Buckner noted that one or another of the white renegades was close at hand, as if strolling past by accident. Kemper's plan was instantly apparent—to taunt Buckner into making an assault upon him. Then one of the renegades would shoot the woodsman down and the visiting party would proclaim that Buckner had been the aggressor. Buckner ignored the insults and Kemper believed that his enemy feared to take issue with him.

Tonk-a-naw now visited interminably at the lodge in which Kemper was housed as a guest. The old Shawnee tippled on the trader's brandy and partook freely of his coffee and sugar. It was Kemper's

privilege to invite the woman who obsessed him to walk with him in the forest. But whenever he presented himself outside her lodge and issued such an invitation, her voice came from within declining it. He was subjected to the added humiliation of watching her come forth to wander into the forest with Buckner whenever the latter called to her. When Tonk-a-naw declined Kemper's offer for White Fawn's hand, as Benoit had confidently predicted would be the case, the trader's rage boiled to the surface. For the third time, he accosted Buckner.

"There was a time when your damned lies caused me to be dropped from the British army," he snarled. "But there never was a price offered for my arrest as a fugitive from justice, as there is now for one Buckner in the State of Pennsylvania. How do you like it?"

Buckner's eyes swept the vicinity. Just within the door of an empty lodge, one of the renegade whites was sitting with his rifle across his knees, his eyes trained upon Buckner.

Buckner's gaze came back to rest upon Kemper. His eyes bored into those of the trader. "I am a Virginian," he said, "and so am little concerned as to how they view me in Pennsylvania." His eyes continued to hold Kemper's. "Look about you," he advised at last.

That the Shawnees had been prepared for some such occurrence was evident. A dozen braves had appeared as if by magic and were eying Kemper bleakly from various near-by points. Standing Bear

and another warrior had entered the empty lodge and were standing directly behind the seated renegade.

Another of Kemper's men appeared round a lodge and two Shawnees quietly ranged themselves on either side of him.

"Did you think, Kemper, that these Shawnees would not observe that you planned murder?" Buckner demanded. Without warning, he leaped upon Kemper and swung a heavy fist to the point of his jaw. The trader measured his length on the ground. Before he could recover, Buckner had disarmed him and jerked him to his feet. The man's face was white with anger. He saw his two men, each of them disarmed and standing between two savages. Benoit, arriving on the scene, surrendered his arms instantly, as a Shawnee demanded them.

"You shall meet me for this, Buckner," Kemper said. "Benoit will act as my second. Choose yours from among the Shawnees."

Buckner's laugh had a rasp in it.

"A moment ago you proclaimed me an outcast," he said coldly. "Yet now you challenge me as one gentleman might another. If you still considered yourself a man of honor, which your challenge implies, you should not waive it to challenge one whom you have branded an outcast. Knowing myself for a man of honor, I decline to waive it to accept the challenge of one whom I know for a cutthroat dog. Therefore, I forego the pleasure of ending your worthless life with pistol or sword, as I would much

like to do, and will settle it in a manner much more fitting to one of your class."

His open palm struck the man's face with a report like that of a pistol shot. The burly trader leaped in with clenched fists; and Buckner's knuckles smashed home on his mouth and drove him back. Coldly and mercilessly, the woodsman hammered the big trader's face. Some of Kemper's return blows found their mark on Buckner's head and body, but he seemed not to feel them and kept up his sledge-hammer punches until Kemper, three times knocked flat to earth, struggled to gain his feet after the third knockdown but collapsed with a groan.

"My brothers," Buckner said to the Shawnees, "you have seen. Grossly this man insulted me, and each time I held my peace because I would not violate the guest rules of the Shawnees. This time, he planned to have me murdered, as you saw for yourselves. My knife would have found his black heart where he stood, but I would not bring trouble upon the Shawnees. The Redcoats might be angry if these men were killed in our town. Therefore, it is best that the murdering dogs be permitted to return to their kennels in the land of the Wabash."

"It is for you to say," Standing Bear decreed.

"Pack and be on your way," Buckner instructed the recovering Kemper.

The man started to offer some surly objection as he regained his feet, but Benoit, with a savage admonition to be quiet, led him away.

"Keep him in hand, Benoit," Buckner advised.

"If he makes further trouble, I shall certainly kill him."

"I'll get him away, never fear," Benoit said. "The bungling fool!"

As they rode from the Shawnee town, Kemper turned on Benoit.

"I would think you were in league with Buckner instead of with me," he snarled. "You agreed to everything he said fast enough."

"Would you have me argue myself out of my hair?" Benoit demanded. "I told you he was waiting for you in ambush. But a man who knows nothing of Indians is always the last to take advice from a man who knows all about them. I've never been in favor of this lunatic mission from the start, and maybe now you see why."

"How could you have done better?" Kemper growled.

"Left to me, and without any one suspecting me of having a hand in the matter, Buckner would soon have been deader than Pontiac," Benoit stated.

"And how would you have fixed it to send him on the trail of the departed Pontiac?" Kemper insisted.

"By the same simple means that Pontiac himself went over that trail," Benoit said. "There are bad Indians, same as there are bad white men, only not near so many. The whites bribed an Illinois Indian to pose as Pontiac's friend and brain him with a tomahawk, which he did. Thus ended the greatest chief the red men ever knew and the most inveterate

enemy of the whites. You recall yourself that the great Mingo chief, Logan, was slain by an Indian in this same Ohio wilderness quite recently. I suspect with good reasons that it wasn't just a personal feud but the result of bribery on the part of the whites. It's always been a favorite trick to dispose of great Indian leaders that way—time and again. If the greatest Indian chiefs have been put across that way, it wouldn't have been any difficult trick to fix Buckner's departure for the happy hunting ground with a barrel of rum. There's any number of war parties from the northwest that head down through the Shawnee country to raid on the Ohio. I could easy have sorted out some of those wild northern braves who'd have agreed to pick a quarrel with him and rap him on the head with a tomahawk. But you would arrange things your own way."

Kemper cursed Buckner and all his antecedents in foulest terms.

"I'll kill him yet," he promised.

"My blessing," Benoit sneered. "But don't be fool enough to try and go into the Shawnee country to do it. I'd like well enough to put a knife in his ribs myself, but not to the point where I'll trade in my own hair for the privilege."

"I wouldn't have tried it that way without consulting you," Kemper said. "But I could see that I couldn't get the girl while he still lived among the Shawnees."

"Oh, damn the girl!" Benoit flared scornfully.

"There's flatboats for the taking and a world full of women to choose from. Why risk your life over one? They're all the same in the end. Use some sense!"

Buckner had informed Kemper that, being a Virginian, he cared little how he was viewed in Pennsylvania. In the main, that was true. He had come to regard the people of the United States as divided into two general classes. One faction consisted of the populations of the old long-established communities, busily engaged in manufacturing civil laws and rules by which life must be lived in teeming communities. The other was composed of the woodsmen of the border fringe, the drovers of the pack trains, crews of the keel boats and the settlers of the outermost frontiers—people whose lives were automatically regulated by whatever rules of conduct were expedient to face the emergencies of the moment.

Those of the thickly settled regions leaned more to group thought and to daily conduct that was cut to standard pattern, tending to take on community similarity of individuals from the very nature of their routine existence. Those of the other class, never knowing what deadly peril from savages, freebooters or the elements might be ushered in with each new sunrise, were similar in thought and conduct only in the respect that each individual was firmly convinced that it was his God-given privilege to regulate his actions to the emergencies of life as he found it. And he fiercely resented all efforts to curb

that privilege. Buckner considered the latter class as his own.

The frontier would be back of him to a man, both as to the act for which he had been imprisoned and in the matter of his escape. But the authorities of Pennsylvania, no doubt, considered his departure without waiting to be tried for his act by the law of the people a far more serious offense than the commission of the act itself.

At first, knowing the sentiment of the entire frontier, as evidenced by the rally of frontiersmen to his aid, he felt only a rankling sense of anger at the injustice of the thing that had been inflicted upon him. The knowledge that Pennsylvania had offered a reward for his apprehension added to the hurt that stirred deep within him. No doubt the authorities classed him with such depraved and vicious gentry as had fled from justice and now were holding out in the Wabash wilderness. He knew, of course, that upon his return to Kentucky, there was not a chance that the Kentuckians would even consider requesting him to return to Pennsylvania for trial. On the contrary, they would hotly resent any such suggestion. It was true, therefore, that he cared little for the viewpoint of the Pennsylvania communities behind the frontier; but it was equally true that he held that viewpoint responsible for the fact that he and White Fawn still dwelt in separate lodges.

The Shawnees took literally his statement that he would wait among them until peace came. Even

the sending of emissaries to his uncle in Kentucky for the goods promised to Tonk-a-naw was waved aside when he suggested that measure. It could not be done without flatly breaking his oath to them. So he settled down to wait for a peace to be effected. He met White Fawn and took long walks with her in the forest, but he could not take her to his lodge nor could he visit her in the lodge of Tonk-a-naw. Save for that fact, he was well content with his lot. He understood the Shawnees and enjoyed the wild free life of the wilderness. If he felt the lack of anything, it was more because he was deprived of the society of Gilpin and the two Hernes than any desire for civilized luxuries.

But the enmity of the tribes of the Ohio wilderness toward the settler of the United States seemed to become ever more bitter. Peace was long in coming. As the months slid past and seasons changed, his being so long deprived of the right to take White Fawn to wife caused Buckner's original scornful anger to deepen into a cold dislike of all thickly settled communities and the ways of the people who dwelt therein. The two classifications into which he had grouped the population of his own nation in his mind grew more sharply defined—and with a wider gulf between. Donner and the inhabitants of Crenshaw Bottom seemed symbolical of one class. Such men as the Zanes, Boone, General Clark and Buckner's own former rangers seemed to typify the other. In common with most men of action, whose lives are filled with hourly hardship, excitement and danger,

Buckner was but little given to introspection and philosophizing. His thoughts had arranged themselves almost without conscious participation on his own part. His convictions and viewpoints were more largely matters of feeling, shaped by events, than the result of cold analytical reasoning. Those convictions, therefore, for that very reason, were proportionately more unalterable.

Always it had been his tendency to feel ill at ease and out of his element in thickly settled communities. Now he had formed a profound determination never to reside where populations were teeming. The frontier was the only enjoyable place in which to reside. There one could meet men of his own breed —and a few steps took one into the wilderness beyond even the last fringe of settlements. Well, he would take White Fawn to his uncle's colony on the westernmost frontier of Kentucky if peace ever came.

There were more white captives than ever before in the Indian towns of the Ohio wilderness. Many of them had lived among the red men so long as to have become naturalized Indians, with no thought of returning to the whites. Others, of course—largely the older captives, not the children—would never become reconciled. Many of these latter were ransomed from time to time by Canadian traders. Buckner heard that Captain Farris, captured during the first expedition down the Ohio at the time of locating the Buckner colony in Kentucky, had been ransomed some six or eight months after his

capture. He had been taken to Detroit, and Buckner wondered if he had made his way to Kentucky.

For a time, it seemed likely that a temporary peace might be patched up. Then an expedition from Kentucky made a swift march to the southernmost Shawnee towns and destroyed the crops. The inhabitants fled before the troops. Moluntha, the old Shawnee chief who had led the warriors against Boone's forces at the battle of the Licking years before, remained with his family and went forth to greet the troops. An officer—the same who had caused the disaster of the Licking by disregarding Boone's warning and calling on the men to follow him across the river—pressed forward among the men. The commanding officer of the expedition called out to him not to molest the Shawnees. But the officer struck Moluntha dead with a tomahawk and would have murdered the rest of the family except for the intervention of the men.

Peace was again deferred and war parties marched south to raid in Kentucky. But such campaigns were increasingly difficult for the red raiders. A constant watch was maintained all along the Kentucky shore of the Ohio. It was difficult for war parties to cross unobserved, even at night. And Kentucky was now so thickly settled that thousands of men could be raised with a few hours' notice. Aspiring settlers swarmed through the passes of the Cumberlands and swept westward through Kentucky and Tennessee like a plague of locusts. Already, Kentucky numbered a greater population than that

of the combined Indian nations of the Ohio and Illinois wilderness. And on the east, another surging tide of settlers was dammed up on the shores of the Ohio in Western Virginia and Pennsylvania, waiting only an opportunity to break through in an overwhelming flood.

At last it became inevitable, from sheer starvation, for the allied tribes to give way and make another stand farther to the west. There were many earnest councils in the wilderness.

"We must fall back to the north and west," a sachem of the Shawnees proclaimed to the warriors of the nation in council. "As our uncles the Six Nations and our grandfathers the Delawares lost their lands in the East and fell back upon the Shawnees of the Ohio, so now must the Shawnees give up a portion of their lands and fall back into the West. For over a generation, the Ohio has been the dead line. The instant we give way a foot, the settlers will swarm into eastern and southern Ohio. Already they have smothered our ancient hunting grounds of Kentucky as thickly as flies smother a carcass. But we cannot hold out here. Our women and our children wail with hunger. The Long-knives will make treaty. We will pretend to believe them. But we all know that their promises are written in the sand. It cannot be helped. We must fall back. The sun is setting on the great nation of the Shawnees as it began setting long ago on our uncles the Six Nations and our grandfathers the Delawares. Perhaps some time the sun may rise on the Shawnees again. Who

knows? But now the face of Manitou is behind a cloud. He sleeps and cannot see the distress of his people the Shawnees."

When the troops marched into the wilderness to make the peace and effect the new treaty, taking over a part of the Shawnee lands, some of the tribes did not even send delegates. There were Delawares and Wyandottes but the main representation was that of the Shawnees. What that most powerful of the red nations decided naturally must be accepted as final by the rest of the allied tribes. Generals Butler, Parsons and George Rogers Clark were the treaty commissioners.

For several days the warriors poured into the appointed rendezvous in little bands. The council began with the passing of peace pipes. There was lack of the usual dignity and gravity that ordinarily was observed on such great occasions; for many of the Shawnee sub-chiefs were hostile and unruly, unwilling to abide by the counsel of their wiser leaders who saw the inevitable and bowed to it. One of these unruly ones jumped to his feet and addressed the assemblage fiercely in the flowing, unpunctuated language customary in treaty councils.

"Chiefs of the Big-knife I see no reason to give a part of our lands as our uncles the Six Nations and our grandfathers the Delawares have done before us their lands are gone and the Shawnees still retain theirs I do not believe we should give up a foot of it you ask for hostages to be put in your hands as a pledge that the Shawnees deliver to you the white

captives among us and the captive black men who belong to the Big-knife as horses belong to the Shawnees the promises of the Shawnees have always been fulfilled faithfully and always will be for we are honorable men and do what we say while the Big-knife does not we have promised to return our white captives and the black men it will be done I speak for our uncles the Six Nations and our grandfathers the Delawares we will return the captives as we promised but we will give no hostages we never have so why should we now. . . . A string!"

The string that the unruly chief threw down was a string of black wampum, a war belt, meaning that the white leaders could pick it up if they chose or abide by his words. There was great excitement in both camps and it appeared likely that the peace conference would resolve itself into the most sanguinary of affrays.

Cool and undisturbed, the three white generals regarded the wild assemblage. General Clark made a motion of distaste toward the war belt. His voice ringing coldly, he addressed the excited ranks of the council.

"The Shawnee speaks bad words. They are unwise. Leave us at once and return to-morrow when you have considered this well and have listened to the counsels of the wise leaders among you. We will talk with you no more to-day. Leave."

The council broke up to reconvene the following day. Meanwhile, the wiser of the leaders, recogniz-

ing the inevitable, impressed the necessities of the occasion upon the more unruly members. General Clark made the first talk, concise and to the point, abating not a single item outlined in the original stipulations on which the treaty had been called.

"The chief who spoke so hotly yesterday was misinformed. The Shawnees have given hostages before as pledges that the captives will be returned to us as agreed." He cited the instances. "You know the terms of the treaty as agreed upon. We have no changes to make and will listen to none. . . . Two strings!"

Of the two strings that he threw down, one was of black wampum, the other of white, one a war belt, the other a peace belt, indicating that the Shawnees might pick up either one that they chose. But the Shawnees had decided. They chose the peace belt and agreed to the terms of the treaty. As the oratory proceeded in the concluding details and in mutual expressions of everlasting friendship in the future, General Clark's gaze roved over the ranks upon ranks of fierce warriors assembled there. His eyes came to rest upon a mighty brave in the foremost row, his blanket pulled up to his chin. The border general's eyes lingered on the warrior's rugged features. An odd sense of familiarity flirted teasingly with his consciousness. Somewhere—no doubt leading his braves in battle, against the soldiers—Clark had seen that towering savage before. The thought tugged his gaze back to the painted face of the Shawnee brave.

Realization came to him with a shock. It was not the face of a former foe but the face of a former comrade in arms—a valiant friend who for long had been mourned as dead. So Buckner had gone back to the wilds, trading the comforts of civilization for life in an Indian lodge. So many woodsmen did. Well, if Buckner had found it good to revert, let him stay and wish him well. So far as the world would ever know, Clark had not recognized the face of a former comrade beneath the war paint of a Shawnee brave.

But Buckner had no desire to remain unrecognized. He waited only until peace had been definitely decided upon before approaching General Clark. When Buckner stated his intention of returning to Kentucky to take up land and settle, Clark wondered if one who had spent the major portion of his life in the wilderness would find anything but discontent in the settlements.

"Oh, I won't live in the settlements," Buckner said, when Clark suggested the thought. "No settlements for White Fawn and me. We'll never go back to them. We'll settle in Kentucky."

Clark's eyes rested on the lovely, eager face of the woman. Then he smiled at Buckner.

"Kentucky is 'the settlements' now, Buckner," he said. "It is no longer the frontier—save in the respect that troops start from there every year to campaign in the Indian country of the Ohio. Already the woodsmen are drifting on, headed for new frontiers in the unknown wilderness of the West."

The general stood with folded arms and watched Buckner and White Fawn, accompanied by a small party of Shawnees, head for Kentucky to secure the goods that Buckner had promised to Tonk-a-naw.

Between the Kentucky shore of the Ohio and the Buckner colony, Buckner found that the wilderness route which the party had traversed to found that colony was no longer wilderness. There were cabins on every hand. Practically every acre of good land throughout the entire distance had been settled. There were clearings on every side, the smoke of burning logs and brush rising to the heavens for as far as the eye could see, as settlers cleared more land.

As the party reached the edge of the wide valley in which Buckner had located his uncle's colony, he called a halt and surveyed the scene. Cattle, sheep and horses grazed in hundreds on the broad meadows. A village of some fifty or more houses had sprung up at the edge of his uncle's land. There was a store building there, and the spire of a white church rose from among a few trees. A mansion, equal in size to that of Great Oaks, loomed among the trees on the wooded point.

Looking back, it seemed no time at all since Buckner had visited that valley, first with a hunting party of Shawnees, when the meadows had been full of buffaloes and elk instead of cattle. His heart swelled with pride at the thought that he had had a hand in winning this country for a land-hungry

people. Still, he was slightly bewildered at the rapidity of it all.

He had left his own few head of horses and cattle with his uncle's herds. There would be more than enough to trade for such goods as he had promised to Tonk-a-naw and plenty left to give him a start in stock on his own account.

Buckner led the way toward his uncle's home. He had forgotten the day of the week. The tolling of church bells and the sudden concourse of people streaming about the white church in the village apprised him of the fact that it was Sunday and that church was just over. Vehicles of various sorts, containing settlers' families, scattered widely along the roads that led out of the village. Several carriages rolled toward the big house among the mighty oaks on the wooded point and Buckner knew that his uncle was having in some of the gentry of the countryside for a big Sunday dinner.

The Shawnees looked about them as imperturbably as if such scenes were daily occurrences in their lives. The people were descending from the carriages before the big house, gazing curiously at the little band of savages that advanced across the lawn.

Lucia Harper was first to recognize the tall warrior who marched in the lead. She took two quick steps toward him, her arms half lifted to him as if from some involuntary impulse. Then she recalled that she was Mrs. Captain Farris. The half-lifted arms were lowered, also her eyes, lest they reveal

what she knew must have leaped into them at this sudden apparition from the past.

His uncle nearly crushed Buckner's hand, as did Captain Farris. All of the young Virginians who had floated down the Ohio with the original locaters of the colony were there, most of them with wives who had come out from Virginia. It was a lively gathering and a merry one. Captain Farris, having been months in the Indian towns as an adopted captive and who understood Indians far better than at the time of his capture, signed to the Shawnees that there would be food in any quantity. The ladies cooed over White Fawn and she met their advances with the natural friendly dignity of an Indian.

The entire assemblage entered the huge living room in a flurry of conversation. Almost immediately there was a strained silence, covered by apparent effort at conversation on the part of Colonel Buckner's wife and guests. The minister leaped into the painful breach with a resounding offer of thanks for the return of the lost ones. Still, Buckner knew that something awkward had occurred. With a shock, it dawned upon him that, instead of seating themselves in chairs, as had the others, he and White Fawn had seated themselves cross-legged on the floor of the living room, in common with the Shawnees. Odd, he thought, that such minute items of conduct were considered of such importance. He would have to pick all those things up again as he had once learned them at Great Oaks.

Lucia Harper Farris, with native tact, smiled

warmly upon Buckner and White Fawn and observed, "Nice of you to do as they do, so they will feel at ease."

But Buckner knew that every member of the gathering was aware of the fact that he had lived so much of his life in an Indian lodge that his act had been a perfectly natural one. Suddenly he knew himself as an alien.

But there was no intention on the part of those present to permit any such feeling to grow. Nothing but utmost friendliness and good fellowship was accorded him. His uncle summoned him to the broad veranda, where they were joined by Captain Farris.

The elder Buckner waved a hand to indicate the landscape that rolled away before them. "Your eyes were the first to rest upon this valley, Rod," he said. "It was you who located us here, on the fairest lands in the world. As Boone and Simon Kenton fathered Kentucky, so you fathered this colony. You should be proud of your work."

Buckner nodded. He was proud of it. Yet in a way he knew that he had had relatively little to do with the building of this prosperous community. Left to his own devices he would not have toiled toward that end, as these others had. He belonged to the breed that blazed trails into new lands. Those who followed blazed trees and claimed those lands. He was proud of the scene of peace and prosperity before him. But there was something missing. Somewhere in the foreground there should be a bivouac fire round which a few buckskin-clad figures were

roasting venison over the coals—a deer or an elk hung up in a tree.

"As you know, Buckner, I am living on the land you covered by your warrants," Captain Farris was saying. "I covered it with my own warrants as well, to make doubly sure. Thousands of titles are being contested these days by aspiring land-seekers who have not the courage to push on to the frontier and take unoccupied land. Lawyers find it easy to cloud titles. But our title is safe. You will take half of it, of course."

He spoke as if the matter were settled definitely and went on to speak of other matters. The elder Buckner declared that he had always intended a thousand acres of his own lands for his nephew and would deed them to him at once. Buckner's heart warmed at the loyalty of these fellow Virginians but he declined their offers. It had only been raw land, he said, and it was through their own efforts that it had become valuable improved property. No, he would take tomahawk rights of his own on unoccupied land.

"Don't you realize that there is no unoccupied land within many miles of here?" his uncle demanded.

He would find some, Buckner insisted.

The wedding was spoken of long afterward—regarded by many as a bizarre affair. For Buckner, devoid of sentiment in so many things which were considered subjects for sentiment by the civilized world, had his own sentiments as to what was fitting

between himself and White Fawn. He declined to have a church or indoor ceremony of any kind. He had courted his mate in the forest with no roof over their heads but the blue sky and the trees, he said, and they would be wed as they had loved, in the open.

They were married on the lawn beneath the great spreading oaks. Buckner had insisted that Tonk-a-naw was the one to give the bride away. When the moment came for Tonk-a-naw's part in the ceremony, Buckner signalled him, and the ancient Shawnee spoke a few words in his native tongue which none of the fashionably attired guests understood.

"She has been a good daughter. I have already given her to this man. Three days back he delivered to me the presents promised long ago. I gave her to him then. That settled it. She became his. But the white men think I should give her to him again. The young bird that falls from the nest may fly back to it again, but she cannot fall twice from the nest without having returned to it once. Having given White Fawn once, I cannot give her again until she has returned to my lodge. One cannot give what he has not. She is yours. Keep her. It was already settled. To give her again is but wind in the trees. If the medicine doctor of the Long-knives wishes to make much talk about what has been done already, let him speak. He cannot change what has been written. That is all I have to say."

CHAPTER XVI

The peace which had resulted in Buckner's return to Kentucky had been of brief duration. Settlers had rushed into the Ohio wilderness, converting old Indian towns into white settlements and forging on to tomahawk their rights upon the trees and claim the land. So swift and urgent had the invasion been that the Indians, in a desperate effort to retain a bit of their territory, had made war against the fringe of settlers who had pushed their outposts farthest into the Indian lands.

In the ensuing war the white soldiers had suffered fearful reverses. One army after another had been hurled back by the red warriors of the wilderness. Harmer's army had suffered great losses and retreated without inflicting a blow upon the savages. Then General St. Clair, with an army of three thousand men, had marched into the Indian country. Fifteen hundred braves had crept upon the soldier camp at night, crawling close in the tall grass. At dawn they had poured in a deadly fire, charging with desperate valor right into the ranks of the soldiers to bring their tomahawks into play. St. Clair's army had fallen back toward the Ohio in a disorganized rout. If the Indians had followed up their advantage, it would have resulted in the

greatest reverse in the annals of warfare between the whites and reds on American soil. But the tired warriors, instead of pursuing their helpless prey, had stopped to plunder the stores and equipment abandoned by the fleeing army. As it was, the white losses had mounted to nearly five hundred men with but a handful of casualties among the warriors of the allied tribes. Immediately after St. Clair's defeat, Mad Anthony Wayne had been selected to launch another and larger expedition. With an army of five thousand men, Wayne had ordered a spirited charge against some two thousand warriors—almost the entire remaining strength of the allied tribes—who had taken their stand in a large expanse of down-timbered forest. Pressed in front and hemmed in on both flanks by cavalry and riflemen, the Indian leaders had conducted the retreat so skilfully that the Indian loss was but forty braves—less than that of the whites. But it was a great victory for the latter, nevertheless. Unable to provide food for their families and still gather to resist the swiftly repeated thrusts of overwhelming forces, the warriors of the allied tribes were forced to fall back again; and Wayne's army, building forts to hold the frontier that had been gained at the battle of Fallen Timbers, had won the Ohio wilderness for the whites at last.

Buckner had taken tomahawk rights on a beautiful piece of land far beyond the westernmost fringe of settlements. Arch Herne, wed to a white girl captive among the Wyandottes, and Tom Herne, mar-

ried to a woman of the Lake Delawares, had taken up land on either side of him. From the first, Buckner had been more hunter than planter. His broad fields had known but little cultivation, merely a few acres of corn and other crops. With rifle, rod and traps, he had provided for his family, trading with the Indians during peace times and disposing of his furs for trade goods.

But scarcely had he settled there before his home was no longer on the far frontier. Fighting with desperation in their own country, the allied tribesmen had been unable to do any but the most sporadic raiding in Kentucky. Since that fertile region had been made safe, the land-seekers had come in an overwhelming horde. They had taken all the land round the holdings of Buckner and the Hernes and surged on for twenty miles beyond. Already most of the game had been killed off. The woodsmen who had not gone on into the unknown West had made a habit of headquartering upon the three square miles of land held under the tomahawk rights of these three members of their own clan.

Buckner had turned a deaf ear to all requests that he act as scout in the previous campaign.

"I have laid down the tomahawk with the Indians," he had insisted. "I'd fight for my own on the frontier, if there was an Indian invasion. Invade their lands farther to make room for more settlements like Crenshaw Bottom, I will not."

Deep within him, though he thought of it but seldom these days, rankled the knowledge that he was

still subject to arrest if ever he should set foot in Pennsylvania.

A sizable group of woodmen had congregated at Buckner's. They felt that the battle of the timbers had broken the backbone of the tribes and that the present peace would last for many years.

"It's odd, then," said a visiting settler, "that the Injuns went raiding again right off and sacked that boat on the Ohio."

"Thar's always a passel of wild young bucks that the chiefs can't control," another offered.

"It was whites dressed as redskins that done it," a woodsman said. "I heered 'em talking amongst themselves when they thought thar warn't a survivor left to listen. I was telling Buckner and the Hernes when I first lit here."

The woodsman, coming down the Ohio on a flatboat that carried the families and effects of two settlers, had remonstrated at the folly of tying up on the Indian shore for the night, even though a peace between the settlers and Indians prevailed at the time. He had escaped the fate of the others by the mere accident of having dropped downstream a hundred yards or more in a skiff to fish for a few hours after nightfall. From there he had heard the attack on those who slept on the boat. They had been murdered to the last one and their goods removed.

"It is that plundering den of snakes in the Wabash country," Gilpin said. "That nest ort to be cleaned out to the last unholy miscreant."

"It's rated as a British settlement. If it was sacked, our government would view it as an act of aggression against England and outlaw the lot of us as bandits," Buckner pointed out.

"Governments, laws and lawyers is skittish and unstable as winds in winter. No predicting which way they'll blow next," Gilpin agreed. "Every man of that Wabash outfit is a murdering malefactor with a price on his head if he returns to the States. If we was to catch ary one of them on United States soil and tomahawk him on the spot, the authorities would label it a public benefaction. If we was to surge over thar and bag the lot, those same authorities would call it an act of war agin England and put the ban on every man of us, like Buckner says."

But all such casual and customary matters as Indian wars and plundering by renegade whites could not hold for long the interest of the remaining members of the brotherhood of the border fringe. Among them there was but one all-consuming topic—the vast frontiers that called all of their iron breed to the unknown West. Many of them had listened to the seductive song of adventure in far places and had headed into the setting sun to see what was in store for them. Some were destined to spring again into world-wide renown as overlapping waves of civilization overtook them. Ten times as many were destined to leave no record of their valiant deeds behind them save for the speculations of those later explorers who chanced across bones that had bleached for decades in the uncharted wilds.

Tales were plentiful of the splendors of the great beyond. Alexander Henry, Thompson and a few other gay and hardy souls had clubbed themselves together and had become known as the Northmen, a little group whose fame was destined to eclipse that of all others in exploration—until the names of the Northmen were forgotten. While the Revolution had been in progress, and during all the subsequent years, this little group of intrepid souls had disregarded all such minor matters as warfare to carry on the much more interesting life of exploring traders. Almost before the first shot of the Revolution had been fired, Alexander Henry, the Frobishers, Peter Pond, the Yankee, and others, had penetrated as far west as Fort des Prairies, to be known a century later as Edmonton, Alberta. They had established posts in the prairies of Dakota and Saskatchewan. Later they had been joined by one Mackenzie, who, not content with the post established by his comrades in the forests on Lake Athabasca, had pushed fifteen hundred miles beyond it into the North and West, across the Great Slave Lake and down the river that now bears his name to the Arctic Ocean. Later, Peter Ogden, Frazer and other illustrious adventurers were to throw in their lot with them.

Former Kentucky woodsmen, returning with the keel-boaters, spun yarns of the wide horizons of Texas and the fabulous wealth of the Spanish colonies of New Mexico. Others came with tales of the limitless prairies, extending from the country of the Osage and Kansas Indians to the mighty ranges

of the Rocky Mountains that bounded the Great Plains on the West. They told of vast herds of buffaloes that darkened the prairies as the pigeon flights darkened the skies of the Ohio wilderness. And from every quarter, all agreed upon the tremendous wealth of furs that waited to be harvested. The allied tribes of the Ohio and Illinois country could muster scarcely three thousand fighting men all told. Yet there were tales of a score of different tribes in the West that could number more than that in a single village; of perhaps a dozen red nations that could boast from twenty to forty thousand souls apiece.

The remaining borderers spoke of all these things. The tales of those of their breed who had gone on beyond fired their waking hours and haunted their dreams in sleep. The gatherings at Buckner's became smaller. The wild woodsmen of Kentucky were faring forth into the great unknown. John Colter came no more. Later he was to cross the continent with Lewis and Clark, remaining to cruise the Northwest alone and become the discoverer of the Yellowstone. Robert McClellan, one of Wayne's chief scouts in the recent campaign, found the settlements too tedious. Later he was to spring again into world-wide renown by guiding the Astorians to the Pacific. Others were to fill the ranks of the fur brigades and scour the West so thoroughly in their quest for fur that every creek that flowed and every lake the size of a pocket handkerchief was to become known to them a generation before exploring geog-

raphers rediscovered the West. The brotherhood of the border fringe shouldered long Kentucky rifles and marched into the land of the setting sun. Among those of their clan who remained behind there was unrest. The siren song of the great unknown was singing in their veins and teasing their feet upon untrodden trails. Out of Kentucky was drifting that breed of men who had made that fair region habitable for softer members of their race, leaving for others to hold what they had won, while the iron clan of the border forged on to conquer another half of a continent for those whose feet would follow the trails thus blazed for them.

Buckner, too—happy though he was with White Fawn, the mate of his heart, with their young son at her breast—was conscious of vague stirrings of unrest. Those tales of far places and battles unrecorded fired his imagination. Gilpin, attired only in moccasins, breechclout and leggings, sat in the sunshine before the cabin, but his old eyes were turned to the West.

A dozen lodges of Shawnees appeared suddenly one afternoon, having caused excitement and consternation among the settlers in their passing. They pitched camp before Buckner's cabin and kindled fires at nightfall.

"We go to the West beyond the Father of the Waters to find a new home where the Long-knives will leave us to our hunting," Standing Bear explained. "It is not long now until the Illinois country, too, will be lost to us. When the other Shawnees

are driven beyond the great river, they will find us waiting there."

Gray Wolf's lodge also was among this offshoot band of Shawnees that had given up the unequal struggle and headed into the West. For three days they lingered on Buckner's land, partaking of his fare. Meanwhile, several settlers' families passed each day on their westward way, all of them looking enviously upon the broad acres held by Buckner and the Hernes, with so little of the land under cultivation.

When the Shawnees prepared to depart, Tecumseh stood alone and watched them pack. They would meet him out beyond somewhere, they said in parting.

"It is farewell," Tecumseh said. "Never shall we meet again. Tecumseh will not be forced across the Father of the Waters. When the time comes, he will stand with his back to the great river and die with his eyes turned toward the land of the rising sun."

With folded arms, the melancholy, haughty chieftain gazed after the little Shawnee cavalcade.

"Your kind goes too," he said to Buckner, gesturing with both hands.

Buckner was conscious of a strange panic as he saw, far across the meadows to the south, the family of Arch Herne, all belongings packed on horses, angling across to join the march of the migrating Shawnees. To the north, the family of Tom Herne was similarly converging upon the Shawnee line of march. Smoke still rose from the chimneys of the

two distant cabins but Buckner knew that it rose from empty homes. Someway, there was an empty spot in his heart.

"Yes," Gilpin said from behind him. "They decided to go out thar and have a look around—the Hernes did. I'll be taking the trail myself. Good luck."

There was an eager, questing look in the old man's eyes—the look that an ancient battle-scarred eagle might cast upon a new hunting ground—as he shouldered his rifle and strode out across the meadows on the trail of those who traveled into the setting sun. Half consciously, Buckner observed that eagerness and contrasted it with the soberness of the Shawnees who had just left. He did not then realize the significance of that contrast. But Tecumseh, the melancholy Shawnee chief who stood with folded arms beside him, realized it all too well.

A light hand fell upon Buckner's shoulder and he turned and looked down into a pair of fond blue eyes that smiled into his with perfect understanding. The half-panic subsided. Wherever he and White Fawn stood together, there was home and happiness, though nations rose and fell. His hand stroked the head of the rollicking infant that rested in the curve of her arm.

"Never let him forget that he is a Buckner of Kentucky," he said.

She smiled at him with the inscrutable wisdom of the female who knows that it matters not so much where one comes from as where one is going. She

spoke in the Shawnee tongue, which she used but seldom now.

"No, my heart. Always he must know that."

She stood with an arm twined through his own and he knew that all was well with him. But within the week that feeling of semi-panic was recurrent. The section of Arch Herne on the south had been taken over by four settlers, each claiming a quarter of it. On the north, the land of Tom Herne had been claimed by four others. And there was a fifth claimant in each case—eight available quarter sections with ten men claiming rights to settle there. Their wranglings were carried to Buckner for verification as to which one had been first to locate his family on each contested tract. A village had sprung up within two miles of Buckner's holdings and two lawyers had located there. They dipped into the matter of the contested claims. Buckner listened to equally plausible arguments on either side.

Suddenly he spoke.

"It is all wind in the trees," he said. Unconsciously, he moved his hands in the old gesture by which the Shawnees had indicated in sign language that they would have nothing to do with a matter. He stalked into the cabin and left all parties to their own devices. What did he care about squabbles over land titles when there was half a continent where one might have land for the taking?

But contesting of land titles was one of the chief occupations in Kentucky these days. Instead of the war whoop launched to the winds, the air now re-

sounded with the oratory of politics and legislation. Those who coveted land in Kentucky but who had not the hardihood to press on to the far frontier and take it, sought to dispossess those first settlers who had fought the savages to hold their homes but who had been careless in the matter of perfecting titles.

Daniel Boone's two remaining sons had been dispossessed and had gone on into the West with others of their kind. Boone himself had lost all of his valuable holdings in Kentucky through contested titles, which had left him unable to pay his neighbors the few debts he owed them. The Spaniards, knowing him for a great colonizer, had offered him a tract of over eight thousand acres of fine land in the wilderness of Missouri. Later, when again the civilization of his own countrymen overtook him, he was to lose title to those lands too. As a very old man, he was destined to return to Kentucky and hunt up old neighbors, to pay from a buckskin bag of gold, earned by trapping in the West, the little debts which he had been unable to pay so many years before.

Buckner heard that Simon Kenton, too, had lost title to his lands and had slipped quietly out of Kentucky, unable to meet his small debts. Many years later he was destined to return, a strange figure moving in bewilderment through the streets of Frankfort while the people smiled at the wild old man of the woods. An old-time resident was to recognize him as the man who was second only to

Boone in fathering Kentucky and to take him before the Kentucky legislature, then in session, and announce his identity; that body voting him a pension of two hundred and fifty dollars a year.

General George Rogers Clark, penniless and no longer needed in Kentucky, had gone on into the West to hire his sword arm and his military genius to the French as a soldier of fortune.

Buckner felt himself stranded. His breed of men had gone on and left him. Instead of planting a greater acreage, that year he planted less. It did not occur to him that others might think it shiftlessness. His was the non-acquisitive outlook of the Indian and the border woodsman. Why raise more food when fewer friends came to eat his fare? He spent much time prowling the woods with his rifle, bagging squirrels and an occasional turkey. To drop a deer was an occasion of moment now. He secured two hounds and hunted "varmints" at night to allay the vague itch of restlessness.

With settlers pouring by the thousands into the Ohio, the allied tribes, pressed farther west into the Illinois country, still maintained the peace. Occasional families of Shawnees presented themselves at Buckner's cabin and feasted for a few days before heading on into the West to join the offshoot band of their nation that had preceded them. Occasional woodsmen, too, stopped there, then headed westward. Again and again Buckner observed that curious difference between the faces of the woodsmen and the Shawnees who headed into the unknown West. The

woodsmen started out with that same eager, questing light that had glowed from Gilpin's old eyes; the Indians with sober melancholy.

Quite suddenly, one day, he divined the reason for that difference. The Indians were banished against their will and went as the rearguards of a vanquished race, backing into the setting sun, so to speak, their eyes turned wistfully to the East, which they would see no more. The woodsmen went eagerly, of their own accord, the advance guards of a conquering breed. The slanting rays of the setting sun did not mean to them the eclipse of their race, but rather a beacon that challenged them to new and high adventure. The setting sun meant the descent of night to the red man, but appeared as a new dawn to the white.

Eastern Kentucky and much of the central area had been settled largely by Virginians under the old charter of that colony, which had given it territorial rights to the Kentucky region a hundred years before its settlement. But in western Kentucky, many of the recent settlers had come floating down the Ohio from Pennsylvania. It so happened that all those who had taken up land on all sides of Buckner's were of the latter type.

A hawk screamed one day from overhead and Buckner started with that old alertness. Always in the days of Buckner's rangers, the scream of a hawk had been the signal to take cover—that an enemy had been sighted in the forest. Those had been the days when enemies swarmed on every hand. He

laughed at that sudden start at the hawk's scream. No, there were not enemies on all sides now. Still, those Pennsylvania settlers that hemmed him in were not his kind of folks exactly.

He sat one evening looking into the red ball of the setting sun. Out there where it still shone brightly were Gilpin and the Hernes, the Boones, McClellan and others of the border clan—and the offshoot band of Shawnees.

Long ago, on that morning when he had looked into the rising sun across the Illinois prairies, the picture of the onrushing swarm of settlers and the banishment of the Indians had been sharp and distinct. Now, as he looked into the setting sun, it was given to him again to lift for a moment the veil of the future—but the vision this time was vague and nebulous and lacking in detail.

It came to him merely as a picture of buckskin-clad figures moving westward on a broad front, and coupled with it the knowledge that wherever powder burned on every new frontier, there would be long Kentucky rifles; and behind them eyes that had been trained to marksmanship in the woods of Kentucky and the Ohio, as the brotherhood of the border moved eagerly on to hew out new frontiers. And suddenly he was very lonesome.

White Fawn, sensing his unrest, came out and rested her hand upon his arm. And presently, two figures came striding across the meadow from the west. Gilpin and Tom Herne talked until well into the night of the wonders of the Missouri wilderness

and the Kansas prairies; of vast herds of bison, streams overcrowded with beaver and Indian nations numbering many thousands, eager to trade for the white man's goods. Before they had recited the half of it, Buckner knew that he would go back with them for just one look around.

CHAPTER XVII

It was on the second night of the westward journey that Tecumseh appeared unexpectedly in the camp of the three woodsmen and seated himself at the fire.

"Those who live in the little settlement west of the Wabash are bad white men," he said reflectively.

"None worse," Buckner agreed.

"When the hawks are at war with the owls, they do not object if a few owls come forth at night to slay secretly among their own kind," said Tecumseh.

"Sartin," Gilpin agreed. "The Injuns had no complaint if them miscreants of the Wabash made war agin the settlers in secret. It was just that much more fighting strength on the Injun side."

"But since peace was declared, those men have taken several boats and killed half a hundred of their own race, leaving none alive to tell of it save a few women who have been taken to their lodges. Devil's business goes on there sometimes of nights. The women there have seen enough to know what will occur if they attempt to speak a word of how they came there. Such of their captures of boats as have become known have been blamed on the wild young men of the Shawnees."

"And thar's a similar nest o' vipers operating

from the Osage country in Arkansas, preying on Mississippi River travelers, for which the Osages is frequent blamed," Gilpin said.

"This Kemper still desires White Fawn," Tecumseh said. "It was that which I came to tell you. Finding you gone, I followed. Often, during your last months among the Shawnees, he sent messages to Tonk-a-naw, offering greater and greater prices. After you returned to the settlements, he did not despair."

Buckner was conscious of a thrill of apprehension. White Fawn and his young son were alone, save for a black woman. Still, a raid on his cabin would yield small spoils in a material way, and those of the Wabash country pillaged for profit. A flatboat would prove a much richer prize and one to be secured with far less danger than a raid deep in the settlements. Kemper might still desire White Fawn but those other marauders could scarcely be expected to engage upon a profitless raid, fraught with considerable danger, for no other reason than to humor Kemper's whim.

Tecumseh, as if reading what was in his mind, continued, "There were many woodsmen round your cabin at first and those of the Wabash turned a deaf ear to Kemper's plans. But he has an informant among the settlers who kept him posted about you. Kemper has prospered. He has offered two men a price far greater than they could make by capturing flatboats to watch their chance to steal White Fawn away and bring her to him. I have it from a Shawnee

woman who is the squaw of one of the men living there. You should not leave White Fawn alone."

Two hours before dawn, Buckner started back toward home, Tecumseh and the two woodsmen accompanying him. A great fear pervaded Buckner's heart as he entered the cabin and found it untenanted. The dead ashes on the hearth were no colder than the dread that clutched his heart.

"Took 'em early last night likely, so's they could cross back beyond the Ohio unobserved before sunup," Gilpin said. "Some neighbor's been watching you, like Tecumseh heard. No doubt Kemper's two miscreants hung out at the informant's place, watching their chance. Well, we'd best be on our way."

Buckner traveled with grief and black rage in his heart and with death peering out of his eyes. White Fawn, of course, would be delivered to Kemper alive. But Kemper would have no wish to be encumbered with an infant. Buckner had no doubt that the abductors had put an end to the black woman and his infant son after reaching the wilderness side of the Ohio. Those jolly little eyes, the same color as White Fawn's, seemed to gaze at Buckner reproachfully as he traveled through the forest. He could not rid his mind of the picture.

On the fourth day, three painted braves waited for darkness in the woods a mile from Kemper's trading post. They had traveled hard and fast but could not yet determine whether or not they had reached the spot ahead of the renegade abductors.

Impatience rode Buckner with merciless spurs as he waited. But he must keep cool for the work that lay ahead. He took quick turns around the immediate vicinity, unable to remain quiet in one spot. Gilpin and Herne sat immovable. Before leaving them, Tecumseh had explained the arrangement of the settlement. Kemper's post, merely a big log trade room with living quarters attached, stood in the center of a string of a dozen or more cabins, straggling at intervals for a quarter of a mile along the course of the creek.

Darkness descended at last and an hour later three warriors came through the blackness to the creek. A dog guarding one of the cabins rushed furiously out toward the intruders. A door was thrown open and a man stood silhouetted against the light.

Buckner scolded the dog in Shawnee and the man shouted a command to the beast to come back. The dog desisted from his demonstrations, returning toward the cabin with diminishing growls.

There was yet another cabin to pass before reaching the dark bulk of the trading house from which a few lights glowed dimly. The door of the cabin opened just before the three prowlers drew abreast of it and a man came forth. He saw the three braves on the trail and greeted them as he stepped into it just ahead and started toward the store himself, paying little heed to the three savages. Indians of all tribes came here to trade or to beg for rum and tobacco at all hours of the day or night.

If this man joined those at the store, it would mean one more to participate on the enemy side in whatever trouble occurred there. The trio followed along behind him in single file, Herne in the lead, almost treading upon the man's heels. There was the sound of a crunching blow and the man went down with Herne's tomahawk buried deep in his brain.

The three men swiftly removed the body from the trail.

"'Twould be simple enough, if only we could ketch them outside in the night, one at a time," Gilpin said in a low tone.

The door to the big trading room stood open, the interior of it dimly lighted by guttering candles. Two men sat there engaged in conversation. Buckner knew neither of them. Doors led from the rear of the main room into living quarters and storerooms behind. All of those doors were closed save one, and it led into a furhouse where raw furs were kept.

Dimly, a hum of voices could be heard, evidence that some of those rear rooms were occupied. Swiftly, Buckner rounded the corner of the building and moved back to where a vaguely lighted square revealed the location of a window covered by glazed deerskin, dressed thin as paper and greased, sufficiently opaque to admit light but not of a transparence to permit one to see through it.

Benoit's voice, raised in anger, reached Buckner's ear through this window. Dark lines across the opaque parchment revealed the fact that the window was barred. Kemper's voice answered Benoit's.

"The plan was for them to pot Buckner when he was out in the woods hunting squirrels and bury him somewhere, then bring the girl here. But he started west for a trip of several months. So they took her. Neighbors will think she's gone visiting. The wench was killed this side the Ohio, so she'll never talk. What's wrong with it?"

"Oh, let it drop," Benoit conceded. "It's your game, not mine. But if you let that she wolverine get away from you, she'll outrun the lot of you to the Ohio and report."

"How will she get away?" Kemper demanded. "That door there, barred on this side, is the only opening into that room. If she did get out through it, which she can't, she'd only be in this room, and no way out of it except through another barred door into the main trade room."

"And she'll fight you like a she-panther every second you're within range of her teeth and claws," Benoit growled.

"Not at all," Kemper declared calmly. "Why do you think I had the brat brought to me alive—out of love for it? A mother will do anything to save her infant. She'll come to terms when she realizes that the babe gets the same treatment at my hands as I get at hers. You will see."

A wave of joy flooded through Buckner at the knowledge that both White Fawn and his son still lived. Then poisonous rage at Kemper sent him striding toward the front of the building. So hurried was his pace that it revealed to Gilpin the state

of the man's nerves and the old woodsman halted him with a hand braced against his chest.

"Steady!" he whispered. "Whatever is to be done now must be done with cool heads!"

Herne's fingers pressed into his arm. In Buckner's mind was a picture of a barred door behind which his mate and her infant were imprisoned; and before it was a room in which sat two men whom he must kill before reaching that door to unbar it. He was impatient to start upon the work in hand. But he was too old a hand at border warfare to allow emotion to rise above reason for long. He fought to regain his usual iron control. This thing must be worked without a flaw. The least slip-up which would give Kemper and Benoit a second's warning in which to barricade themselves would be fatal. It would give the occupants of that scattered line of cabins time to swoop down to aid those in the post. Once started, the attack must be carried to a conclusion swiftly, and, if possible, silently.

Buckner steeled himself to calmness. A whispered conference was held. It would be no trick at all to shoot down those two men in the main room. But Benoit might bar the door to the room in which he sat with Kemper on the instant, until he could determine the cause of the shooting. It could not be done that way; Gilpin was elected to remain outside to intercept any who might come along while Buckner and Herne attended to matters inside.

The two men who sat in the big main room looked up indifferently as two savages entered silently from

the night, the dim light of the candles glinting on the bright paints that adorned naked chests and faces.

"Where trade man?" Buckner asked gutturally.

"He'll be out pooty quick," one of the men said.

Buckner sought to shuffle on past toward the closed door behind which were Kemper and Benoit. If he could once reach that door, throw it open and spring inside, Herne would handle these two men in the main room.

"Where you go?" one of the men inquired.

"Injun man talk now with trade man," Buckner grunted, holding to his course.

With surprising agility, the man sprang from his seat and barred his path.

"You no go there!" he snapped.

Those words were his last. Buckner's tomahawk was buried so deep in his forehead that as the man was hurled back by the force of the blow, the handle of the weapon was wrenched from Buckner's grip. Without waiting to retrieve it, Buckner sprang toward that closed door thirty feet away. Even as he started, Benoit, bent upon seeing who had arrived, threw open the door and peered out. His startled eyes took in the scene and he endeavored to slam the door in the face of the savage who sprang for him with a naked knife in his hand.

Herne, who had struck down the other occupant of the room at the same instant that Buckner had felled his man, had tossed up his rifle to shoot Benoit but could not because of Buckner's rushing form.

Buckner hurled himself at the closing door and thrust one leg into the diminishing crack of it. It jammed the calf of his leg painfully. There was a roar from behind as Herne fired past him through the planks of the door. The heavy ball found Benoit and hurled him back. Buckner threw wide the door.

Benoit was groping about on hands and knees, stricken by Herne's ball. Buckner leaped over him and sprang at Kemper, who had gained his feet and had seized a tomahawk from the wall. Buckner's left hand clamped on the trader's right wrist before he could bring the tomahawk into play. Only then did he realize that there was another man in the room. From where he had been sleeping on a bunk in the corner of the room, a bearded renegade launched himself at Buckner with a knife.

Buckner swung Kemper to interpose the trader's body between himself and this new antagonist. Another form hurtled into the room as Herne leaped headlong over the groping Benoit to assault the man with the knife. The first blow of his tomahawk almost severed the man's wrist, the next found his brain.

"Look to Benoit!" Buckner said.

His mighty left hand held Kemper's wrist helpless. His right hand held his knife low and to the rear of his right thigh where the trader's clutching left hand could not reach it. His eyes glared pitilessly back into the terrified stare of his vic-

tim. Kemper struck him twice with his left hand.

From behind them Herne's voice sounded. "Too bad you can't look up, Benoit, and see whose hand is about to send your black soul to hell and put a stop to your murdering on the Ohio."

Stark horror stared from Kemper's eyes as Herne's tomahawk descended upon the head of the crawling Benoit. The trader's mouth opened to utter a shriek for help. Twice he screamed.

"So!" Buckner said. "You who have murdered many helpless ones in cold blood, bleat in fear like a sheep when your own time comes to die. Keep quiet! Never before have I struck my knife into a screaming squaw!"

Twice his knife leaped up. Then he cast the man from him into a corner where he fell in a limp heap.

Already, Herne was lifting the two bars that secured a heavy door leading into another room. Buckner swung it open. White Fawn sprang into his arms, holding her infant.

"Come, my heart," he said, taking the baby from her. They fled out through the main room, Herne stooping to retrieve the rifle he had dropped to spring inside to Buckner's assistance. As he cleared the outer door and stepped into the night, Buckner grasped his own rifle which he had left against the wall just outside of it. The intended program of silence had failed and the occupants of some of those near-by cabins even now would be on their way through the night to investigate. Even as he raised his voice in the signal to Gilpin to draw off, there

was a report from the far corner of the building.

Then Gilpin answered the call. Presently he was running with them through the forest.

"Since you'd made such a ruckus inside, I took the liberty of shooting down the big miscreant who rushed over so precipitate from the next cabin, instead of tackling him with a silenter weapon," the old man said.

Throughout the night they traveled into the south without a halt, then pressed on again after a few hours' rest. They made a forced march of it to the Ohio and crossed that stream at night.

"Thar's none who set eyes on us that lived to tell who done it," Gilpin chuckled, as they parted there in the moonlight on the shores of the Ohio. "If it does come out we was in it, and they consider it an act of aggression against England, they'll find me and Herne in our new hang-out half a thousand miles deep in Spanish territory, where the more aggression you practice agin England the better the Spaniards think of you."

"There'll nothing come of it," Buckner said. "It can't be pointed out that we did it without pointing out why. The less investigating there's done round that renegade hang-out, the better for them, and they know it."

Gilpin and Herne prepared to drop off down the Ohio in a canoe to head for their new stamping ground in the West.

"That country will be United States too, one day," Herne predicted. "A large slice of the folks

out thar is Kentucky border men. The Missoury wilderness is overrun with 'em now."

Buckner stood and watched their canoe glide off down the moonlit stream until it became a black speck in the distance. And his thoughts traveled on ahead of it to that bright country where they were heading. Again he saw a thin line of buckskin-clad figures, armed with long Kentucky rifles, advancing on a broad front into the glamorous unknown lands of the West.

The Buckner family bivouacked until dawn, then headed on toward home. As he strode along with his infant on his arm, without being conscious of it, Buckner lapsed back into the old habit of addressing White Fawn in the Shawnee tongue. With quick perception, she answered in the same language. They made another overnight camp when within a few miles of home, for the reason that the infant was worn and cross from overmuch traveling. In the shadows round the edge of light thrown by the campfire, Buckner seemed to see dim forms bivouacked for the night.

When he reached his own place early in the morning, he was somewhat surprised to see a rude pole-and-bark shack at the edge of the timber, a hundred yards from his cabin. There was a similar camp, with a wagon near it, farther along the edge of the meadows. Buckner went down into the meadow to catch his half-dozen head of horses while White Fawn cooked breakfast. He picketed them near the cabin.

When he emerged after breakfasting, he observed a group of men coming toward him from the pole hut along the edge of the timber. There were four men and three nearly grown boys.

"Well, we might as well tell you fust off," the spokesman for the party said. "We all has jumped your land, a family to each quarter."

The group eyed him with truculent apprehensiveness, resolved to carry through their plans, yet doubtful as to what a man of Buckner's reputation might do. His breed usually took the law into their own hands. For a space he regarded them in fierce silence.

"We're willing to law you about it," the spokesman said. "Thar's only one squar way to settle sech matters—accordin' to law."

Still Buckner maintained silence. The fierceness faded slightly from his eyes and into them crept an expression as if they gazed upon some distant scene.

"The lawyer who settled us here says you ain't got the ghost of a title. It ain't boughten land or warrant land. You took it by tomahawk. But you ain't worked it, except for a triflin' patch of crops, and ain't even fenced. Lawyer Enders says he can bust your title easy as prickin' a bubble. No use fighting about it. We'll settle it by law."

They watched him with that same truculent apprehensiveness. A woman with hair as yellow as his was black, and with pansy-blue eyes, came from the cabin to join him. She spoke to him in some alien tongue and the men fidgeted with uneasy suspicion

as Buckner answered her in kind. Turning their backs upon the visitors, the pair of them disappeared in the cabin, to emerge again a brief space, their arms loaded with personal effects which they deposited near the picketed horses. Swiftly, Buckner saddled two of the horses and put pack saddles on the others.

The land-jumpers held a heated conference some little distance away, then approached him again as he expertly packed the effects which White Fawn was carrying out to him from the cabin. He put the final hitch on the last pack and swung to the saddle, his long Kentucky rifle balanced across the pommel before him.

The men drew back as he faced them from the saddle. But there was neither melancholy nor menace in the eyes he turned upon them. Rather, there was an eager, questing light in them, as in the fierce eyes of the eagle that has been caged and liberated at last to fly again toward the sun.

Then Buckner headed his horse toward the West on the trail of his fellows of the border clan who had gone on ahead. Never again would he fall so far behind them.

The men stood there until the forest beyond the meadows had folded round the little cavalcade. Then they turned to gaze at one another in wonder at the ease with which the thing had been accomplished.

And off in the forest that had enfolded them, Buckner and White Fawn gazed at each other with

perfect understanding. With eager hearts and high hopes, they were riding on toward that land of promise that lies always just ahead—always just around the bend or over the next divide.

THE END